HTcH

the journal of pop culture absurdity

FREE INSIDE! POP ROCKS

#22 • $4
Spring 2000

Pizza men's secret lives

Breastfeeding: The sour truth

Turkey TV dinner taste test

White trash puzzle pages

'The Omega Code' comix

Ramen noodles

'Millionaire' mania!

HITCH

#22 • SPRING 2000
MAY CAUSE DISCOLORATION OF URINE AND/OR FECES

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in HITCH

the journal of pop culture absurdity

Wordy Stuff

Got Breastmilk?/14 It's finger-lickin' good! By Ken Davis. **Pizza Man Confidential/16** Those zit-faced hell-on-wheels delivery guys are people, too, you know. By Rod Lott. **Let's Talk Turkey/18** In a showdown of TV dinners, can anything best Banquet? By Jamie Rogers. **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? I Do! I Do!/20** Regis is cool, and when I get on that damned show, I'll be sure and tell him that. And that's my final answer. By Rod Lott. **'The Omega Code' Comics/21** Wherein we put words into Casper Van Dien's mouth. Hey, someone has to! By Rod Lott. **Rich Pringle's Fun & Games/26** After a prison stint, our resident white-trash correspondent/horndog is back in action, challenging you with various mindbenders, braintwisters and whatnot. By Rich Pringle. **Livin' La Vida 8-Ball/30** Can man live off the advice of the Magic 8-Ball alone? A HITCH scientific experiment by Ryun Patterson.

pg. 8

Departments

Heapin' Mailbag/3 Someone sends us mail addressed to "BITCH." An accident? You may the call. **Disc Dish/32** As usual, reviews of music in its most superior format. Reviews by Rod Lott. **Videos/40** More mummy movies and a little T&A for good measure. Reviews by Rod Lott. **Hong Kong Express/56** Ryun Patterson reviews some boots (as in bootlegs). **Harrison, 2-Year-Old Movie Critic/57** My son reviews his favorite tapes. *And you will like it.* By Harrison Lott. **The True Adventures of Uncle Frank/58** Our new, exclusive comic strip, and boy, are we proud. By Brian Winkeler.

pg. 14

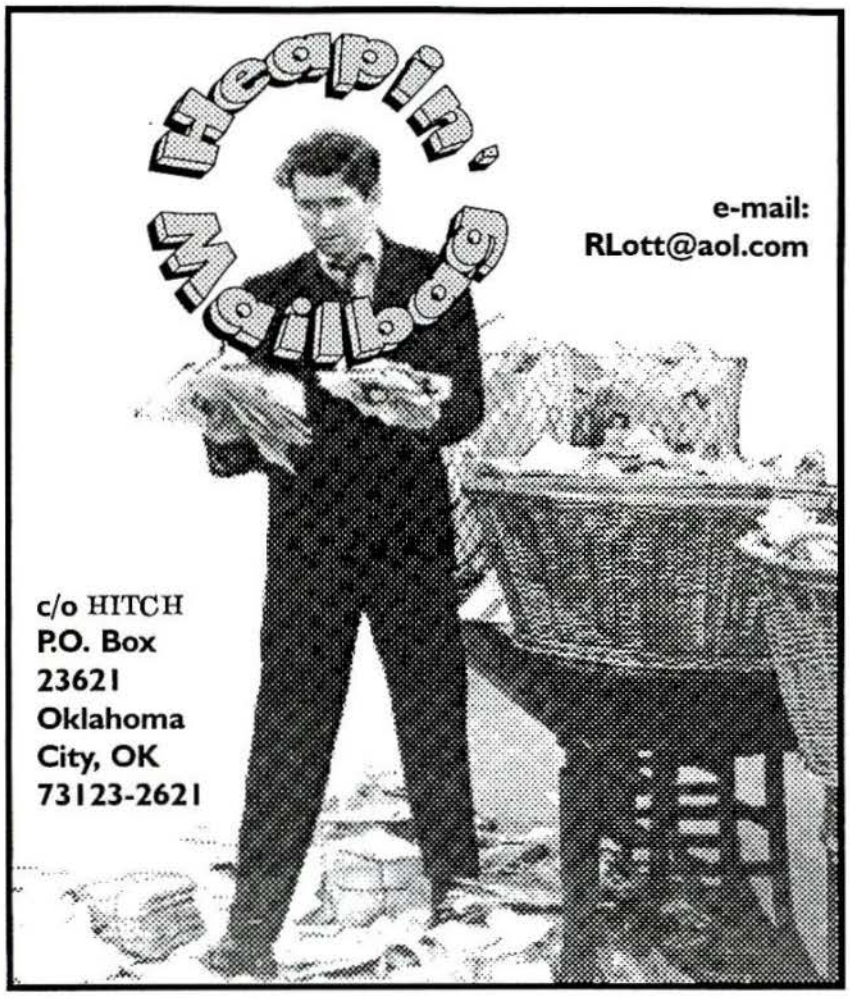
HITCHBits

Ramen: Cheap for a Reason/6 "Six for $1" is not a good sign. By Rod Lott. **Iggy Pop: An Archaeological Dig/7** Lord knows what you might find! **Blair Witch Vomit/7** Forget the sticks; what about the puke? By Chris Sharpe. **Tom Neesnan's Belated Movie Reviews/7** *Jaws 3-D*? Better late than never. By Tom Neesnan. **The Robert Goulet Death Watch/7** God, can we trade him for Madeline Kahn? **Ghosts of Cartoon Christmas Past/8** Dreaming of a Pac-Man Christmas? Then this is for you. By Rod Lott. **Random Movie Still of the Month/8** With some would-be tuffies. Wearing hats. Can't wait to not see this one. **Parenting Corner/8** G-rated fun with latex. By Ken Davis. **Darth Maul: Bachelor's Night Out/9** The Sith is so money, he doesn't even know it. Photos by Steve Hunt. HITCH **Condensed Books/10** Featuring the easiest target in the world: Hollywood! **USA Today Gridlocked!/10** Shows you didn't miss. **The Wit and Wisdom of Hefner Road Animal Hospital/10** They just keep it coming. **Indie Labels Find Big Bucks in Film Biz/11** Call it a puff piece if you want; we just call it timely. By Rod Lott. HITCH **Paparazzi/11** Warning: Cheap lesbian joke ahead. **Making a List, Checking for Lice/12** Who says white trash aren't organized? By Ken Davis. **The World's Last Pokémon Card/12** And not a moment too soon, huh? **Are You Lookin' at Me?/12** It'll be sweeping multiplexes near you ... *all year long!* **Instant Messaging = Instant Fun/13** Three more examples of why AOL is fun. And not a "ROTFL" among them! By Rod Lott

pg. 16

pg. 36

"The truth is, I practice absurdity quite religiously." —*Alfred Hitchcock*
"Comedy is not pretty." —*Steve Martin*



Letter of the Month

Dear sir,

I have recently read an issue of HITCH which my good friend had forwarded to me. I must express my extreme pleasure with your tome of observations, and your team's verve in reporting relevant issues to modern, if not sarcastic, individuals with discriminating tastes. In a phrase, you are a "bad ass," as the colloquial term goes.

My one and only copy has been removed from my office desk (no doubt to be found by following the gasping laughter amidst a maze of carpeted cubes). How do I subscribe?

Best of luck to you and the team as you compile the next issue.

Greg Heanue
Atlanta

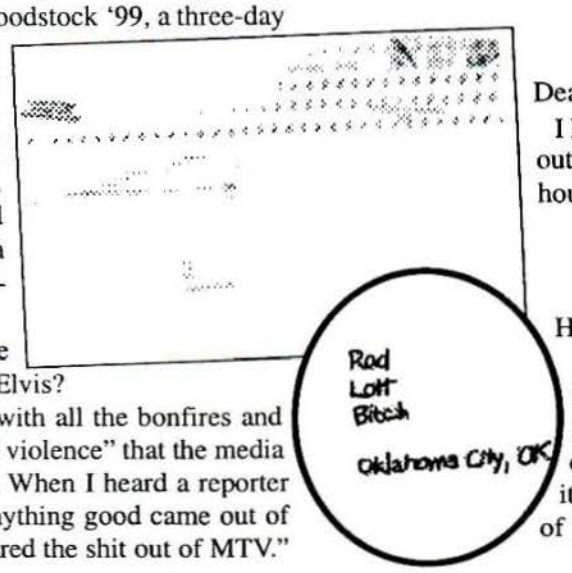
Rod,

Please take time out from selecting your back-to-school wardrobe to renew my HITCH subscription for the next six issues. I hope you had a great summer.

The big event of the summer for me was making the 20-mile journey to my old hometown of Rome, N.Y. to attend Woodstock '99, a three-day festival of filth, noise and breasts. Despite the brain-melting heat, a half-hour death march between the two stages and the general squalor, I managed to amuse myself. I saw some swell music (Chemical Brothers, George Clinton, James Brown, Andy Dick, Elvis Costello) and was able to completely avoid the likes of Brian Setzer, Everlast, Jewel and all bands with one-word names.

By the way, which Elvis Costello do you like better? The skinny 1977 Elvis, or the fat 1999 Elvis?

I even got to see the surprise grand finale with all the bonfires and looting! It really wasn't the "orgy of rioting and violence" that the media have been trying to sell, but it was interesting. When I heard a reporter ask one of the promoters a few days later if anything good came out of Woodstock '99, I thought, "Absolutely! We scared the shit out of MTV."



And as the Beatles said, you know that can't be bad.

Scott Cornish
New Hartford, NY

Hi!, members of HITCH.

First of all, I'm sorry for my english because is very elemental. I'm a spanish fan of terror, sci-fi, sexploitations, oriental and b-movies. I show your direction in a catalogue.

I write you this letter for two things: First of all, because I'm interested in get some of your magazines (if this is possible).

I write you too, because I'm going to publish a fanzine (one of that magazines with low quality made for fans) with my brother (We are "De Dios' Factory" and we want to make some short films this winter, under the name of "De Dios' Factory" too) and I'm interested in get some publicity of you to insert in my magazine (what do you think about this?)

Well, giving you thanks for your attention, I say you bye for the moment.

Jose Angel De Dios Garcia
Valencia

The Usual Gushing Praise

Rod:

Once again, thanks for the many kind words about *Atomic TV* (HITCH 20).

Wanted to say thumbs up on the Mike Alway article ("Él Capitan: The Cotton Candy World of Mike Alway"). My favorite piece! I first heard about him via the Kahimi Karie song "Mike Alway's Diary" and his name has come up subsequently in interviews with Kahimi and various Le Grande Magistry/Momus-related record reviews.

I *loved* "The Periodic Table of Annoying People." I work with chemical engineers (I know, I know, you must envy me!) who are constantly walking around with their periodic table charts and that just struck me as especially brilliant. Well done!

Great, great issue, as per usual!

Tom Warner
Baltimore, MD

Dear Rod,

The usual gushing praise for all the hilarious articles and movie reviews in the past few issues. "The Fall Season of Our Discontent" (HITCH 19) was the funniest thing I've read in a long time. "Kinda the Best of HITCH" (HITCH 20) was great, especially "Excerpts from David Hasselhoff's *Baywatch* Diary." Keep 'em coming.

I'm writing in regards to *The* HITCH *Armchair Video Companion*. Sounds like a great idea and I'd definitely buy it. Obviously, the cheaper the better, but if it had pictures and was 300 pages *a la* the *Videohound* series, I'd be willing to pay more.

Adam Balivet
Danville, VT

Dear Rod,

I loved HITCH 20. Read it in the subway and laughed out loud like a lunatic cracking up in the middle of rush hour!

Shaun Fields
Toronto, Ontario

Hey,

Just got done reading your story on your accounting adventures ("Accounting for Dummies," HITCH 21) and I can say that I have worked hard all day at the masonry and there is nothing funny about it, except maybe for the deep, intuitive conversations of "bobcats," "backhoes" and daily pussy stories, but

THAT'S HOW

WHY IT SUCKS TO BE ME

Hot off the heels of our fifth anniversary issue – our best ever, I feel strongly – this little HITCH was just a bitch to produce. Not a single issue to date – even those wrought with computer troubles – has been half the headache to do as this one.

The main reason was an early-fall pipe break in our home that we awoke to one morning, along with standing water over half the house and a moldy stench to rival them all. Not only did it render us homeless for a little while, it put us – or at least *me* – out of emotional commission for the better part of two months.

During a crisis like that, you don't feel like doing *anything* – not that you *could* in the first place.

Incidentally, during this time, no fewer than three people told me, "That's the joy of being a homeowner," and I just wanted to punch them all.

The good news is that our low-deductible insurance policy took care of almost everything, and now that the new carpet is down, our living room looks far more livable than ever before.

The bad news is playing "catch up" after an eight-week hiatus is exhausting. It made me realize I have far too many irons in the fire. But to remove any of them would leave a void in my life, except for that pesky one called "Day Job."

Long story short: Hey, here's HITCH 22!

Book of Zines editor Chip Rowe once said zine publishers should never apologize for an issue being late. But when you do your best to get them out on a fairly regular basis, you kinda feel obligated. So, sorry.

Unless you bring up the fact that it makes the Christmas-themed pieces within unfashionably late. In which case, bite me.

AND IN OUR REAL LIFE...

As if you couldn't tell from his article "Got Breastmilk?," HITCH Wichita Bureau Chief Ken Davis is now a father for the second time. And by the end of March, the Mrs. and I will be, too. Both our families welcome girls into the fold this time 'round.

In other staffer news, Joe and Jamie Rogers have moved to New York City, which opens up scads of future article opportunities. Ryun Patterson just relocated to Cambodia of all places for a two-year stint – expect him to file stories

anyway, let me get to the point: I laughed my ass off reading your story more than I do in a year. So I thank you for helping me to soil myself at the end of a good hard day!

Clippy
clippy1123@aol.com

Rod,

I think HITCH 21 is my favorite issue except for the one with McGruff the Crime Dog on the cover (HITCH 12). This issue is really well-balanced with lots of good stuff to it. The color cover is great, but I wish you had them trimmed. I know it probably adds to the cost, but it makes the finished product look a lot more finished.

My favorite parts:

1. I loved the "HITCHBits" section. The letters and your intro are always one of the best parts of HITCH, but you did a really good job with all the upfront stuff this time. I thought Malena's commentary ("Star Whores: The Buxom Menace") was great. (That line from *Kalifornia* always cracked me up.) Too much good stuff to mention.

2. "Who'll Pray for Hollywood": I think this is one of your best he-man installments yet. I laughed many times throughout this, especially when you referred to the clubbers thinking you were Gomer Pyle.

3. The e-mail thing ("Accounting for Dummies"): I can't believe you kept it going so long. That was really hilarious.

4. Frank Henenlotter ("Gobs and Monsters") was great.

5. The CD was nice!

6. Video reviews are great as always. This section is what you're becoming known for, I think.

Least favorite parts:

1. Didn't really like Louis Fowler's "I Know What You Did Last Summerfest" article, but don't tell him. I don't want him to "kill" me like he's going to "kill" everyone else in the article.

2. Although it was my favorite article from a design standpoint, I thought the *Star Wars* article ("What If They Gave a Star War and Everybody Came?") was a little drawn out. I guess if I had read it before the movie, I would have really liked it. Maybe I don't like it because I have bad feelings about the movie. Anyway, nice layout job, though.

In conclusion:

Great job. Too good to be a "zine." You need to take it big time and get rich.

Ed Donovan
Burbank, CA

Big time? Get rich? I agree!

Dearest Rawd,

Just received HITCH 21 – a good issue. I like the *Star Wars* story layout. "Accounting for Dummies" made me laugh often – my *Felicity* diary! Heelarious.

One final note: many refs to breasts as "mams" throughout – I recall Fowler and Mrs. Lott both, maybe you, too ... why not try something like "boobies" or "breasticles"?

E. Mervin
New York City

Rod:

I was heading out earlier tonight to catch *Mystery Men* when I checked my mailbox and found HITCH 21. Most eye-catching cover yet. (And the back cover ain't too shabby either, if you know what I mean...) As usual, I flipped right over to the video reviews and checked out a few. Good work, as always.

And I'll be interested to read the *Star Wars* stuff. For the record, I haven't yet seen the movie, as I believe it has entered the exclusive club of Nike, McDonald's and Disney as entirely too big to be trusted. It has become the Empire, and I plan on resisting.

Chris Henry
Swainsboro, GA

Rod:

Love your zine. Pretty accurate review of *The Phantom Menace* ("Videos," HITCH 21) by the way.

Bryan Gibson
gibson@cactuspears.com

Rod:

We love the new issue of HITCH. Luv the H.R. Pufnstuf piece ("The Return of Krofft Cheese," HITCH 21).

Aime
Los Angeles

Rod:

Thanks for the latest. Particularly enjoyed "Accounting for Dummies," especially the last letter from the student when she caught on. Are there that many RLotts that they are now attaching five-digit numbers to your name?

Chip Rowe
Chicago

Rod:

Got the new HITCH 21. Funny as usual. I thought the funniest thing was the back cover. I showed it to my wife. I was laughing my ass off and she looked at it and said, "I don't get it." I tried to explain it to her, but still don't think she understood.

As for the CD, I absolutely *love* track #6, "Round the Bend" by The Beta Band. That's one swingin' tune.

Les Pennick
Wichita, KS

Dear Mr. Lott,

I really like your magazine. It's very funny, and slightly naughty, so I make sure my mom doesn't see me reading it.

Brian Winkeler
Oklahoma City

Rod–

I really got a kick out of your new issue – especially the children's book writer piece ("200 Wrongs Don't Make a Writer," HITCH 21)! Very funny stuff.

Dana Countryman
Everett, WA

Rod:

Got HITCH 21, and it's great as usual. First thing I noticed was the color cover. And the CD.

Taylor Holland
Austin, TX

Rod–

Excellent publication! Well-written and laugh-out-loud funny!

Daryll Collins
Maineville, OH

Rod:

Cool issue. Cool CD.

Melissa Wabnitz
Norman, OK

New Website

Rod:

Your site looks great. Clean, efficient, calming. I didn't even take my medicine!

Got HITCH 21 today. The CD is in my player. Rock on.

Josh Saitz
New York City

Hey!

How did you pull off putting Mike Myers on the cover (HITCH 21)? Did it cost you big?

Kristopher Krug
kris@cardstakes.com

Rod Lott,

I was introduced to HITCH when I was senior in high school, and our journalism teacher had a copy of HITCH on his desk. Who knew? Anyway, when I found out we had a friend in common, I had told him to tell you what a fan I was, but to no avail.

I just wanted to let you know that the Mentos thing ("Deconstructing Mentos," HITCH 3 and 20) was the funniest article I have ever read. It was great! When will we find it on the website?

Congrats on five years of fabulous writing, and keep up all the good work. One huge fan,

Alison Foster
Oklahoma City

Rod,

I found your website while surfing for information about Tommy James (with and without The Shondells). Do you still have copies of issue 8 available for sale?

Steve Laug
Baldwin, MO

Rod,

You're becoming a sellout.

Bill Matherly
Oklahoma City

Subs & Whatnot

Rod,

What is happening? Are you still putting out your zine HITCH? I always enjoyed the news, wit and sarcastic humor! Let me know the status of HITCH. Thanks!

R. Chris Sullivan
fasthaul@bellsouth.net

While HITCH still exists, Chris, we cut out all that wit and sarcastic humor about three years ago.

Hi Rod,

Here's $24 to put an end to my angst with regard to my fear of missing an issue of HITCH. At least for six more issues, anyway.

Paul Kazee
Brooklyn, NY

To whom it may concern:

I have recently been trying to find out more about zines. Through the Internet, I have become interested in yours. I would greatly appreciate a recent issue of HITCH.

Kristine Corcoran
Oxford, OH

Rod:

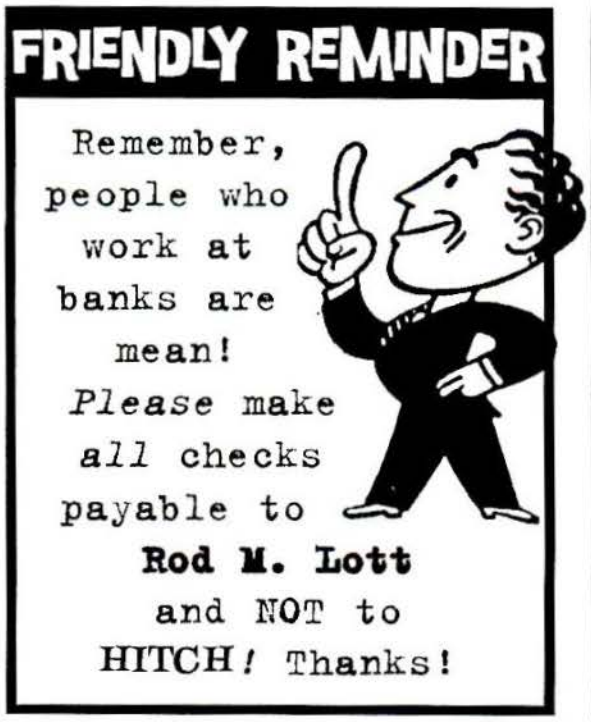
"Smartass fun" sounds darn good to me. Joe of TRGTTUP was an hour-and-a-half's worth impressed, so maybe I will be, too?

Lily
San Diego, CA

Yo yo–

I wanna get HITCHed.

Kaydee Bridges
Nashville, TN


FRIENDLY REMINDER
Remember, people who work at banks are mean! Please make all checks payable to Rod M. Lott and NOT to HITCH! Thanks!

involving tsetse flies, I suppose.

And finally, we welcome OKC-based Brian Winkeler with the opposite-inside-back-cover, yes-it's-all-true installment of "Uncle Frank." (No one here – not even Brian – endorses Frank's views.)

INTRODUCING ... FF!

Maybe it's a heavy release season or I just can't keep up with them all, but this issue's "Disc Dish" initiates a new sidebar – "FF" – to cram smaller, bite-sized reviews of CD into these pages.

We've always made it a policy to review every CD we receive, and this will allow us to continue doing so, while still handling the volume. The discs still get exposure, you still get the benefit of a review. Hey, everybody wins.

PEOPLE WHO ARE SMARTER THAN YOU

Congratulations to our five winners of last issue's "Cheep Thrills" contest. For their taxing efforts, all of the following were awarded a free Frank Zappa CD from the now-folded Rykodisc:

- Emilie Nelson, Austin, TX
- Jarrod Kopp, Tulsa, OK
- E. Mervin, Brooklyn, NY
- Joel McLemore, Tulsa, OK
- Richard Humbert, Kyoto, Japan

As an added bonus, Ryko sent these winners an *additional* package of *more* free CDs, including My Life with the Thrill Kill Kult and a compilation entitled *La Vida Folka*. Now don't you wish *you* would have entered?

Ryko was cleaning house and we ended up with several more copies, which we sent along to those subscribers who have been with us longest. Thanks to David Greenberg for supplying us with the discs, who has since moved on from Ryko, which has ceased to exist as we knew it.

MORE FREE STUFF

Hope you enjoyed the free Astralwerks CD of electronic music that came with the last issue. We're all out, so those Internet surfers who have been requesting copies are out of luck. See, kids, it *does* pay to subscribe!

This issue, we don't have more music for you to read HITCH by, but rather candy to eat HITCH by. Courtesy of Chupa Chups USA comes free Pop Rocks and Chupa Chups lollipops, which you'll find in the middle of this issue. Our thanks to them for rotting our readers' teeth.

Warning: Do *not* eat the Pop Rocks while drinking Coke. We all know what happened to Mikey, right?

See you in a few months. Alive, I hope.

HITCHBITS with gravy!

Ramen: Cheap for a Reason

Our world is an imperfect place. War erupts over religious differences, the ozone layer continues to deplete, half of all marriages end in divorce and peanut butter costs $5.19 a jar.

It is on this latter point that I am proud to say a solution does exist. For poverty-stricken students and those of an even greater financial strain (like, say, recent college graduates), the foodstuff known as ramen noodles has fed many a hungry mouth without making a dent on the household budget.

Put simply, there is *nothing* cheaper than ramen noodles. A pack of gum costs more than ramen noodles. You can pay for a package of ramen noodles with the pennies you can find in the grocery parking lot. (Even fewer if it's this week's Bonus Buy!)

As with anything, it has its pros and cons. First, the pros:

- Cheaper than dirt.
- So easy to make, men can do it
- Heck, even Christopher Reeve
- Wide variety of flavors allows for different kind each day of the week
- Easy to shoplift, should you be unable to afford to part with eight cents
- Ideal for stockpiling in your Y2K preparation

Now, the cons:

- Smell nauseates
- Smell nauseates the second time around, too
- After-taste nauseates
- Layer of paste on tongue remains for hours, all the while nauseating
- Has slimy, worm-like texture
- A lot of fat grams for so little food
- Negative effect on breath resists all mints, no matter how curiously strong
- No one will sex with you any day you eat ramen

Even despite this last strike against it, ramen noodles remain wildly popular on college campuses nationwide.

For years, ramen was my meal of choice if I had to cook for myself – partly because I thought they were so tasty and partly because they were so darn easy. You boil them, stir them and add the flavoring. I also drain the water out, but others prefer to let it remain, in order to create a total soup experience.

Either way, my dad always remarked when we made it, "I can smell that crap upstairs! That makes me wanna throw up!"

I never understood what infuriated him so much about it, until some random weekend in early 1998 when I just could not finish the ramen I had prepared for lunch. It just suddenly made me ill. At that point, I vowed half-heartedly not to touch the stuff again.

But just the other day, for the first time in more than a year, I ate ramen noodles. It's not that I cracked; there was literally nothing else in the house to eat, and we had only a few packages of ramen that had been sitting in the dark recesses of the cabinet for quite some time. They are older than my two-year-old son.

But Ramen noodles seem to resist the aging process, with the only noticeable effect being the cakelike consistency of the flavor packet.

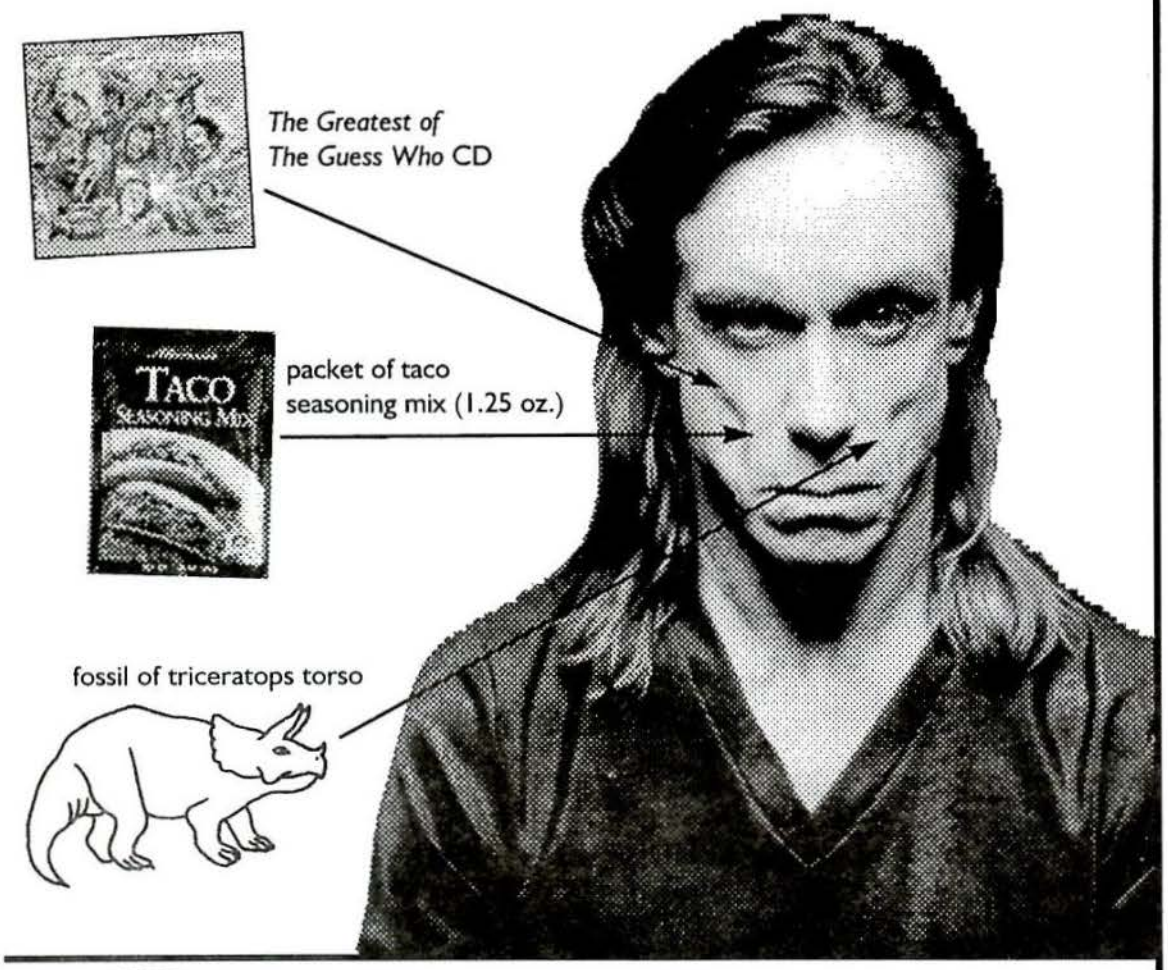
For me, the variety of flavors has always been the heart of ramen's appeal. There are many, although not all of them are worth eating, no matter how cheap. Here is a rundown of the most common flavors:

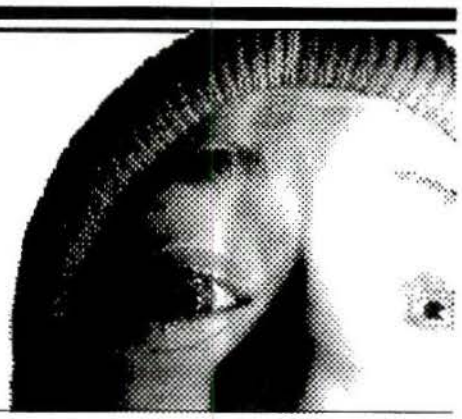
- Beef – It's what's for dinner. And it's good.
- Chicken – Tastes just like chicken. Which is to say, good.
- Pork – The other white meat flavor packet. Again, good.
- Oriental – This also is quite good. Although I've never tasted an Oriental, I will have to take their word that this is what they're like.
- Hot 'n' Spicy – This one made me swear off ramen for more than a year.
- Seafood / Shrimp – I don't eat anything that swims. I extend that rule to powders flavored to resemble anything that swims.
- Creamy Chicken / Mushroom – Now that's just wrong.

As if choosing between flavors weren't enough, one must pick among several brands of ramen. It seems that everyone is in the ramen noodle game. Why, just a few of the companies churning out these crunchy, uncooked bricks are Campbell's, Maruchan, Smack, Nissin and (I may be wrong on this one) Fu Manchu. *—Rod Lott*

Lust for Loofah

Iggy Pop: An Archaeological Dig





BLAIR WITCH VOMIT

You already know that *The Blair Witch Project* was the indie hit of the summer. But did you know it's also one of the most vomit-inducing films in cinema history? If you've seen it, you know there is very little onscreen gore, but the jerky, handheld camera movements have caused headaches, nausea and even worse among audience members.

In its opening weeks, the film induced a rash of serial puking at Oklahoma City's popular AMC Quail Springs 24, prompting preshow warnings from the staff.

"Every time I started the movie, I had to call down to make sure somebody made the announcement that people had been experiencing motion sickness due to the film," said Dylan, a former AMC projectionist. "In the first week of its release, we had 42 people throw up."

The puke was so copious, the theater had to order two new cases of the pepperminty "powder stuff" that is used to absorb the mess.

With so much upchuck in the air, people were bound to get hit in the crossfire.

"I heard about people leaving with huge messes on their shirts," said Dylan. "Some people couldn't make it to the rest rooms in time. A lot of people got thrown up *on*, too, but they all got refunds."

—Chris Sharpe

Tom Neesnan's *Belated Movie Reviews*

Going Ape! (1981)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

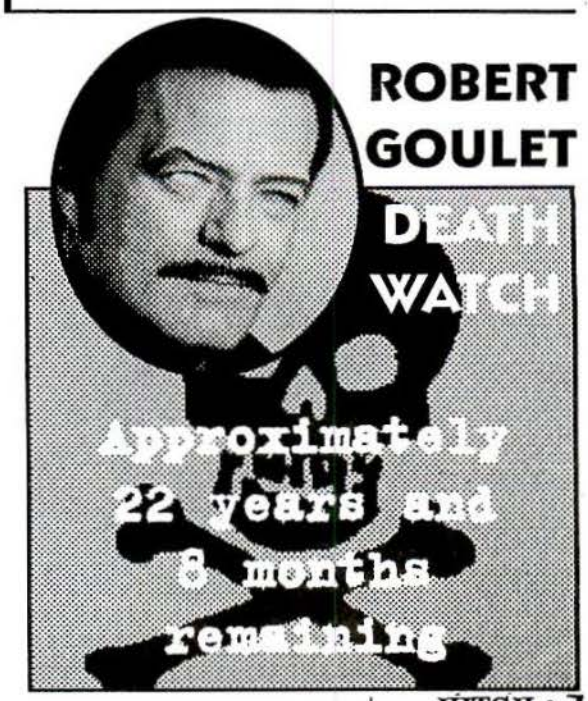
This is a movie that, to me, was good! The man from *Who's the Maid?* has to babysit a trio of apes to gain his large inheritance, and funny things happen! I do not know where they come up with funny stuff like this! Once I tried to write a story about an ape that was a bartender, but it turned out to be a real disaster because ol' Tom couldn't think of funny parts to happen in the story! But *Going Ape!* has plenty of funny parts in it, and I think that it would be a good movie for you take a friend or old acquaintance to see – that is, if you want to see a real funny movie!

Jaws 3-D (1983)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

This is a really scary film! Let me tell you that if you like scary movies that you wear special glasses in, this is the one that will suit your fancy! It has a real scary shark in it and the black man who played "Chappy" in *Iron Eagle*. That stellar combination, along with a tub of buttered corn, made ol' Tom feel like he was in movie heaven! But I must warn you that if you are scared easily, this film is not a good one for you to see, and perhaps you should see *Quigley Down Under* instead, because at different parts of this movie, sharks literally jump out of the screen into your lap! But if you like a good spook, *Jaws 3-D* is for you!

Flatliners (1991)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

In this movie about science and medicine as it pertains to death, I was really amazed to see what can happen when people take their ideas too far. But ol' Tom thought it was a really good idea to have the nephew of Don Sutherland act, because he helped the science parts seem a lot more believable! In the movie, a group of medicine students want to die so that they don't have to take a test, and when they do, they see all kinds of things! When I die, I hope I see my Aunt Pauline's noodle-bake casserole. She died a while back, and it is a meal to behold, I tell you! Well, see this film, because it is like no other film I have ever seen, and they make it real easy to watch because it is really good!



'Tis the Season to Be Smurfy

Ghosts of Cartoon Christmas Past

Along with the rest of a grateful nation, one of the things I most enjoy about the Christmas season is the inevitable rerun of *It's Christmas, Charlie Brown*, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* and any of the Rankin-Bass specials. These shows have run for decades now, year after year.

But what about the forgotten Christmas specials, produced during the heyday when *every* cartoon character had one? In the spirit of goodwill, we at HITCH revisited a handful to take stock in their joyous messages, brought to you by several greedy corporate sponsors.

Casper's First Christmas (Hanna-Barbera, 1979)

Plot: Casper tries to teach his uncle the meaning of Christmas. The uncle is reluctant until Santa shows up and gives him a house, per Casper's unselfish wish.

Fine But...: Santa doesn't remember the dead kids.

Uncomfortable Subtext: Not a woman in sight among these guys all hanging out in a remote cabin on Christmas. One of them gets a pair of leotards as a gift.

Musical Numbers: 3

Strategic Guest Stars: Yogi Bear, Huckleberry Hound, Quick Draw McGraw, Pixie & Trixie

Major Annoyances: Half-hearted laugh track; that Casper is such a pussy.

The Smurfs Christmas Special (Hanna-Barbera, 1982)

Plot: The Smurfs prepare for a holiday festival, of which evil Gargamelle will have nothing. He instead plots to kill the Smurfs one by one.

Fine But...: Christ would never give us the Smurfs; the cartoon ends before allowing Gargamelle to carry out his special brand of ethnic cleansing.

Uncomfortable Subtext: Hundreds of guys; one untouched girl. You do the math.

Musical Numbers: 3

Strategic Guest Stars: None, but there is a pack of angry wolves that is not put to proper use, if you know what I mean.

Major Annoyances: Use of "smurf" as an all-purpose word; that damned "la-la-la-*la*-la-la" theme, which we hear four times in one form or another.

Christmas Comes to Pacland (Hanna-Barbera, 1982)

Plot: Pac-Man and friends save the day when Santa crash-lands and his bag of toys is missing.

Fine But...: The uninjured Santa stays home and sits on his fat ass while Pac-Man does all the work.

Uncomfortable Subtext: Pac-Man achieves tremendous pleasure in biting his male ghost neighbors.

Musical Numbers: 1

Strategic Guest Stars: Santa Claus

Major Annoyances: It's just fucking stupid. "Merry Christmas to all and to all a good chomp." What the hell is that supposed to mean?

—Rod Lott

Say Cheese!

Random Movie Still of the Month

From left to right, Ashton Kutcher, James Van Der Beek, Dylan McDermott and Usher Raymond in Steve Miner's *Texas Rangers*.

Attention DHS!

Parenting Corner

Game: The Balloon Game
Created By: Ken Davis

For Ages: 2 to 10
Supplies Needed: One latex balloon (preferably round)
Preparation: Blow up the balloon to a medium or large size, tie the balloon.

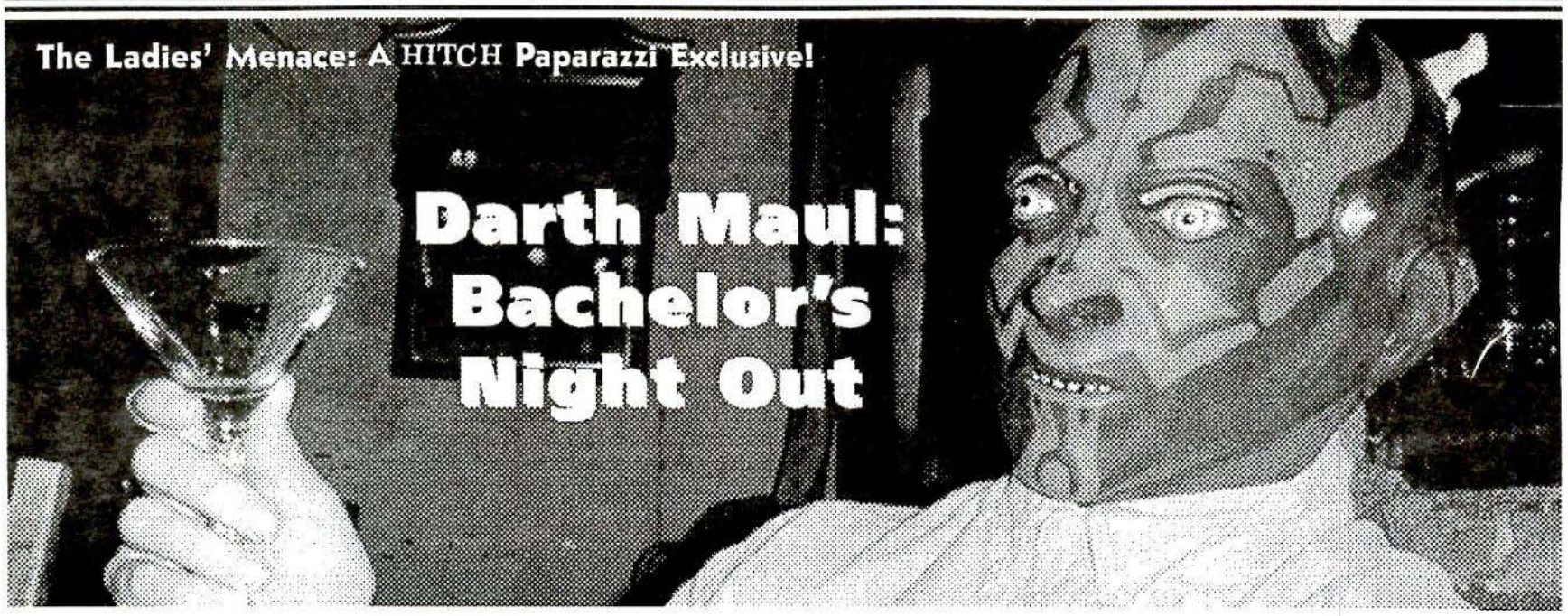
How to Play: Tell the child you'll be throwing the balloon into the air. Explain that once the balloon is in the air, he can't catch the balloon, nor can the balloon be allowed to touch the ground. Throw the balloon into the air and watch the child entertain himself for hours while you sit back drinking coffee and reading the newspaper.

Game Variations:
- Allow the child to choose which color balloon to use.
- Tell the child if the balloon touches the ground, you'll pop it.

Expert Play:
- Use more than one balloon.

—Ken Davis

The Ladies' Menace: A HITCH Paparazzi Exclusive!



Darth Maul: Bachelor's Night Out

(Darth's exploits, clockwise, from right)

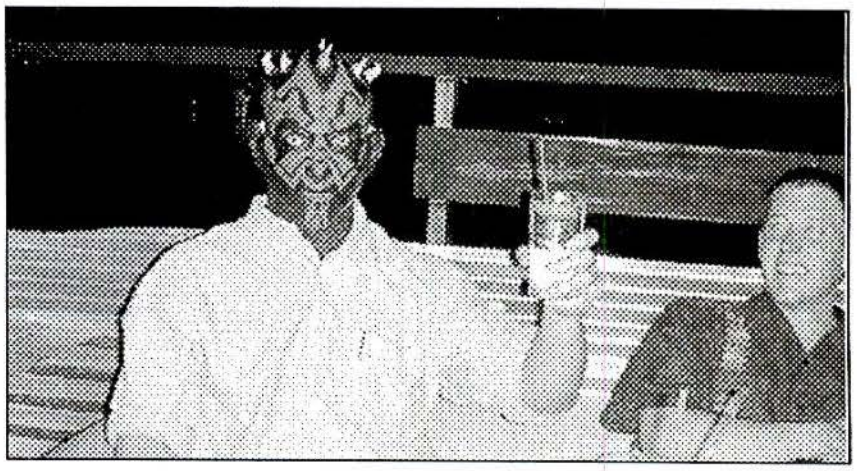
❶ Darth downs a cool one with his new frat buddy Chad.

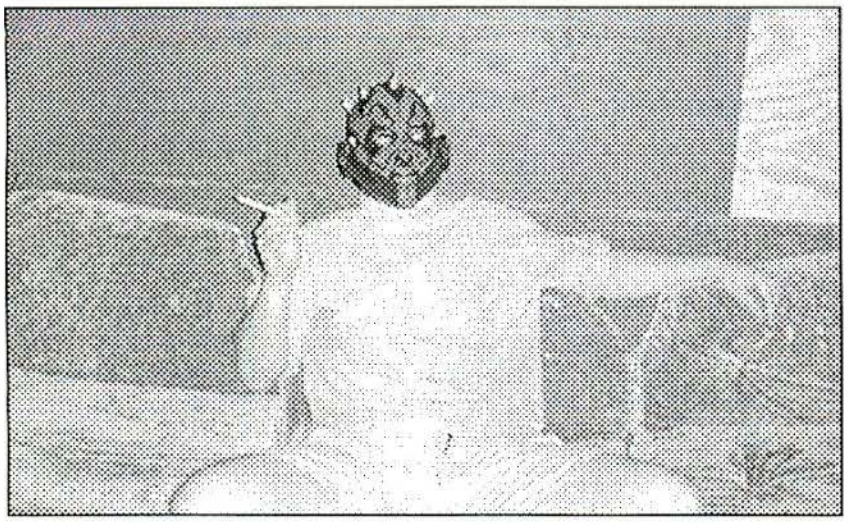
❷ The evil one from a galaxy far, far away gets cozy with the lovely one from the Far East.

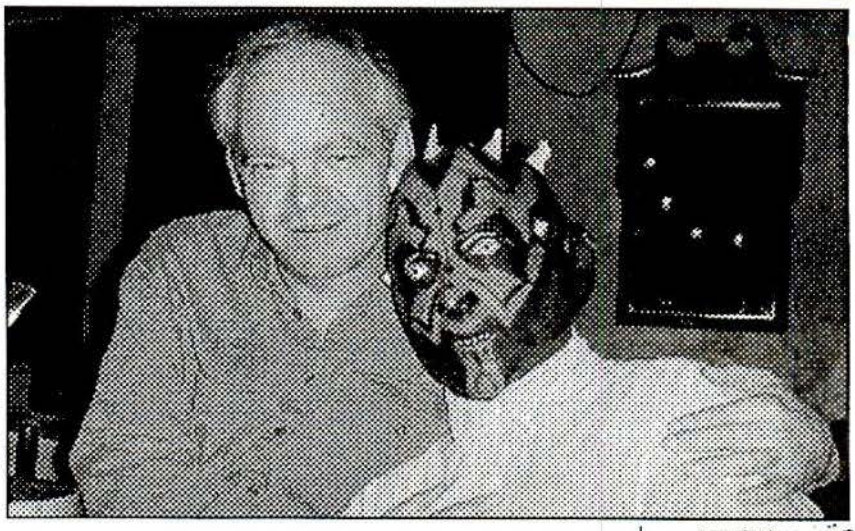
❸ Darth senses a disturbance in the Force.

❹ After a quick restroom interlude, Darth enjoys a Pall Mall.

❺ Hey, ATOs, never underestimate a Sith's power to pull in the 'tang.

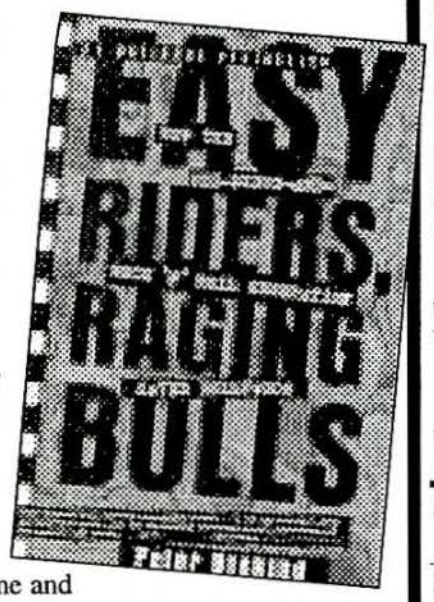






Nothing but the Good Parts

HITCH Condensed Books



This Month: *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* by Peter Biskind (Touchstone Books, 1998)

Both (Robert) Towne and (Warren) Beatty were great students of medicine, and Towne became a fast draw with the PDR. At one point, the two men, along with Jack Nicholson, semiseriously entertained the notion of finding an outstanding premed student, putting him through medical school, and then maintaining him as their own personal doctor, always on call. ... (Faye) Dunaway was in the habit of peeing wastebaskets rather than take the walk to her trailer. When she did use the john in her Winnebago, she did not deign to flush it, calling for a teamster instead. ... (Michelle Phillips) allowed Beatty to gratify several interests at once, one day letting him accompany her on a visit to her gynecologist. The doctor obligingly let him share the view. ... "The first sex I had was with a black hooker, five bucks a pop, and for years I would just see hookers," (William Friedkin) recalls.

The Wit and Wisdom of Hefner Road Animal Hospital

"DON'T HISS! PURR!"
"WE PAY ATTENTION TO DE TAILS"
"HOT DOGS NEED SHADE!"
"PREVENT LABOR DAYS: SPAY & NEUTER"
"SHARPIE DIEM – SEIZE THE DOG"
"PURR-HAPS GOBLINS ARE COMING?"
"WE DON'T TRICK! WE TREAT!"
"CAN'T STAND HEAT? DON'T BE A TURKEY"
"REVOLUTIONIZE YOUR CAT!"
"SANTA PAWS IS COMING"
"GIFT CERTIFICATES ARE PURR-FECT!"
"HOWLELUJAH!"
"HAPPY MEW YEAR!"

USA TODAY GRID-LOCKED!

It's easy to see why the TV listings in *USA Today*'s Life section are so abbreviated. Hell, *you* try cramming a bunch of words into that little grid. We know this makes some of them funny. What we *don't* know, however, is why half of them are on the Sci-Fi Channel.

Below are some of the most recent head-scratching offenders. —*Rod Lott*

Network	Program	Description
Sci-Fi	*Friday the 13th: The Series*	Monkey statues.
Sci-Fi	*Highlander: The Series*	Hateful vengeance.
ESPN2	*Auto Racing*	Thunder Race; midgets.
Sci-Fi	*Sliders*	Wade joins a vampire rock band.
Pax	*Diagnosis Murder*	Dead mime in bed.
Disney	*Zorro*	Fight peons.
CBS	*Becker*	Ex-wife; book.
WB	*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*	Cloven-hoofed villain and sidekick.
ABC	*Dharma & Greg*	Eerie dolls.
Cinemax	*Prom Night*	An ax killer stalks guilty teens at the prom, complete with disco and strobe light.
Sci-Fi	*Star Trek*	Marry or die, Spock.
Pax	*Touched by an Angel*	Kidneys match.
CBS	*Nash Bridges*	Caitlin accidentally shoots Nash in the posterior.
Sci-Fi	*Friday the 13th*	A teacup grants wishes.
CBS	*JAG*	Harm and Mac annoy each other on a cramped nuclear submarine.
Sci-Fi	*Highlander: The Series*	Mikey is fascinated by trains.
FX	*NYPD Blue*	Unfaithful chiropractor.
HBO	*Spawn*	Spawn learns a lesson.
FX	*Penn & Teller's Sin City Spectacular*	Cow.
ABC	*America's Funniest Home Videos*	Boy rips duct tape off his grandmother.
Sci-Fi	*Highlander: The Series*	Kanis, that dog!
WB	*Sister, Sister*	Dance; dominoes.
Fox	*Guinness World Records: Primetime*	Woman tries to blow herself up.
Pax	*Diagnosis Murder*	Murder? Tax evasion?
TV Land	*Dragnet*	The big dog.
Fox	*Guinness World Records: Primetime*	Two boys have werewolf syndrome.
Sci-Fi	*Highlander: The Series*	Thugs try to take Amanda's head.
Sci-Fi	*Friday the 13th*	Glove transmits illness.
Sci-Fi	*Sliders*	The Sliders trade rare snakes.
PBS	*In the Wild*	Birute Galdikas and Julia Roberts protect orangutans.
Pax	*Chicken Soup for Soul*	A clown values his job.
Fox	*Ally McBeal*	Ally saves fat attorney.
Sci-Fi	*The Outer Limits*	Man finds wife ugly.

Music Licensing 101

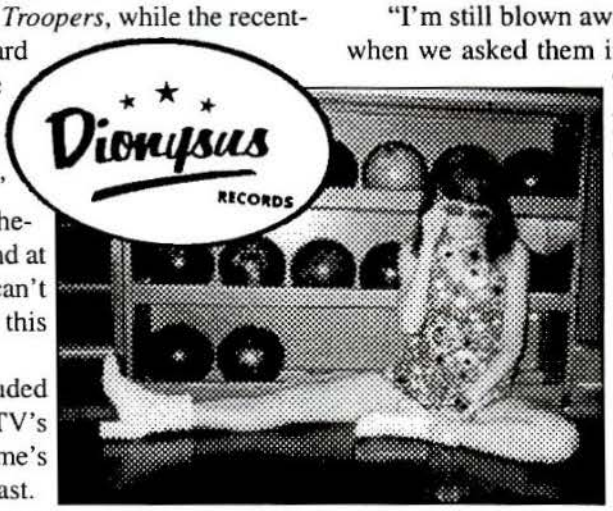
Indie Labels Find Big Bucks in Film Biz

With the soundtrack biz now hotter than ever, the tunes you hear in motion pictures and television shows are not accidental. Thus, music licensing for film and TV is proving to be a financial boon to record companies.

At independent labels, the added cash can help a lot. Aime Joseph, vice president of Dionysus Records, saw a huge opportunity when she joined Dionysus full-time and gave birth to Diorama, the label's licensing division. After all, Dionysus, now celebrating 15 years in the business, had lots to offer Hollywood, from lounge and exotica to surf and punk.

The gamble paid off, most notably with two big-budget, high-profile films. The Bomboras' "Pier Thirteen" found its way into Paul Verhoeven's space-bug extravaganza *Starship Troopers*, while the recently deceased Chaino had three jungle tracks heard in *Forces of Nature* (though, sadly, not on the soundtrack album).

"Having music in *Starship Troopers* and *Forces of Nature* was a big milestone for us," Joseph said. "I remember sitting in the AMC theater, hearing our music and then looking around at middle America and thinking, 'Wow! I can't believe so many people will be hearing this music!'"



Dionysus' Aime Joseph

Dionysus' other placements have included *Freeway 2: Confessions of a Trick Baby*, MTV's latest season of *The Real World*, Showtime's *Naked City* series and ESPN's Indy 500 telecast.

The licensing game can be an easy one to play. A label can be contacted on a regular basis by clients working on various projects. Often, they get a lot of inquiries or referrals. It helps to promote the label's wares, as Dionysus did by sending out copies of its *Music Supervisor's Best Friend* CD sampler to more than 300 production companies, film studios and freelance music supervisors.

"A lot of times we will get calls from clients asking for genre-specific music. At that point, we usually make a few recommendations and send the client a variety of CDs that would fit their needs," Joseph said.

The cost to use a track varies wildly. According to Joseph, "We've gotten as little as $100 per sync and master use, and as much as $10,000! Generally, the average for us is between $500 and $1,500. Obviously, feature films and network TV series pay more than commercials and independent features."

Though it would seem to be easy money, deals are not always worked out. Recently, an episode of *Nash Bridges* called Dionysus to use a Frenchy song in an episode, said Joseph. The rate was agreed upon and the paperwork completed. The day before they were to film, however, the director changed his mind and went with a hit song that probably cost them five times more than the rate for Frenchy, thus offering yet another reason to detest Don Johnson.

"This is just part of the business," Joseph sighed. "I've found that if I don't get my hopes up or tell the band, who will then get their hopes up, neither of us will be bummed if the deal doesn't pan out."

Surprisingly, not all bands are eager to reap the financial rewards of film and TV licensing.

"I'm still blown away by a comment one of our potential artists made when we asked them if they wanted us to pitch their music to film and TV," Joseph recalled. "The singer said, 'Not if you're going to put my music in a Budweiser commercial.' Why anyone would want to turn down close to $20,000 and the chance to have their music heard all over the world is beyond me!"

And sometimes, though the money is worth it, the marriage of music to movies isn't always the most pleasant arrangement.

"I guess I can be honest now that I've been paid: *Starship Troopers* was *the worst* movie I think I ever saw!" Joseph said. "On the other hand, I would much rather have made two months' salary by spending less than an hour on licensing paperwork than two months in an office temping or at a McJob!"

Any projects that got away?

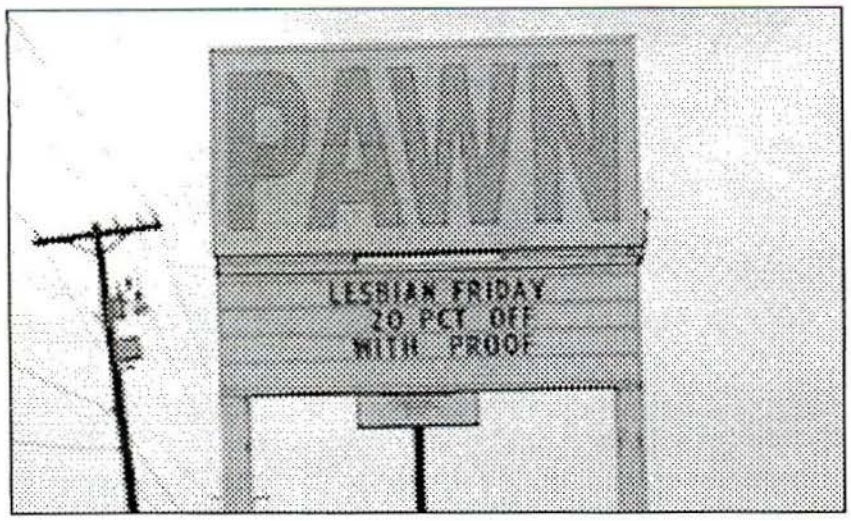
"It would have been ideal to have music in both of the *Austin Powers* movies. This really bummed me out, because not only would so much of our music been absolutely perfect, but the director, Jay Roach, was my cinematography teacher when I was going to USC film school!"

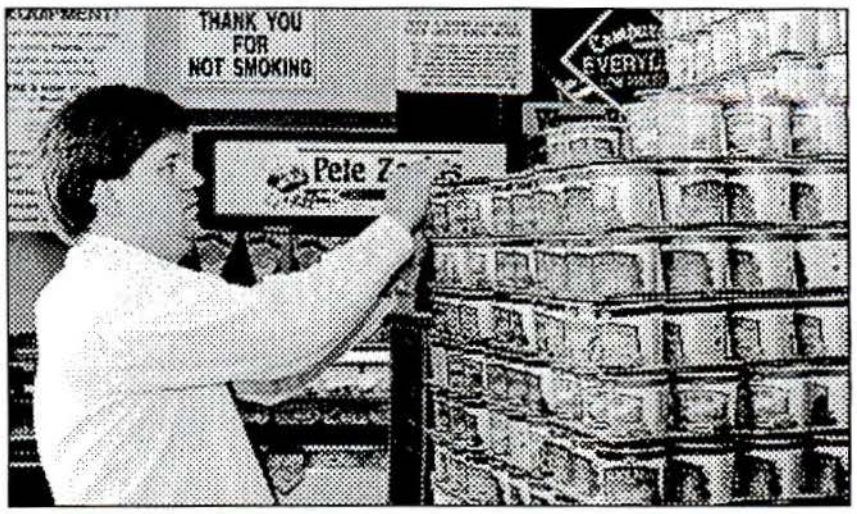
Yeah, but why *Golf Balls!: The Movie*?

"Because the director took the pictures on our Dead Boys album and didn't ask for any payment, so we gave him a really good rate!" she said. "Sometimes, if the people are super cool, the movie doesn't have to be the next *Gone with the Wind* or, in my case, *Quadrophenia*, *To Sir with Love* or *Contact*!"

—Rod Lott

HITCH Paparazzi





(above) A man adjusts his beans.
(left) No caption can lick a deal like that.

27. Call a Lawyer

Making a List, Checking for Lice

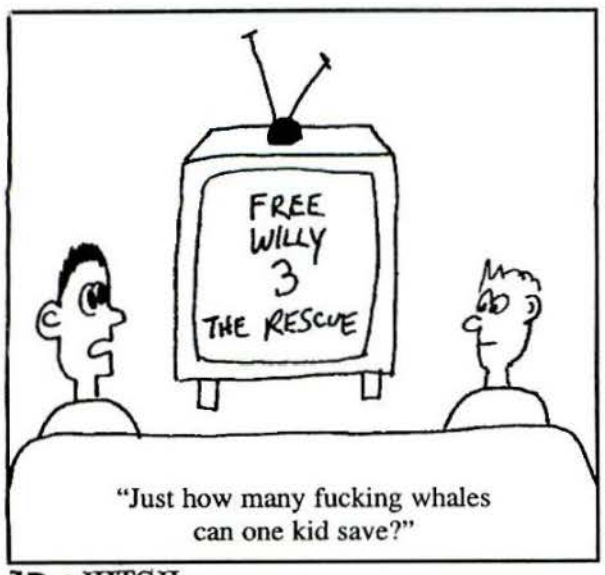
Ever wonder what a "white trash" to-do list might look like? Wonder no more, my friends. The following list was in the front pocket of a guy I arrested recently on some outstanding warrants.

Pay particular attention to items 5, 12, 16, 18 and 19.

Things to do Today

1. Talk to O.E. after 5:00 pm
2. Talk to Marv and search for truck or trailer to do trees
3. Do something with stuff at Jessica's and poss. pick up table
4. Talk to John a must if poss!
5. Dad's jury trial is today!
6. Work on Kenwood (Radio Shack?)
7. Ask around about door opener and waterbed
8. Call Grandma
9. Doug (south?)
10. Beard and Must. trimmer (Bullfrog's) a must if poss!
11. Call Cory about work (work for deposit or rent?)
12. Talk to Crazy
13. Place by Jess's
14. O.E. - Ron after 5:00 pm
15. Caps for Nissan - (Sue? Peg? Howie?)
16. Fly control a must! swatter, tape, spray?
17. Trunk with lock for stuff at Grandma's
18. Shampoo from Denny a must!
19. Tat work?
20. Bullfrog's car? (Ramp for exhaust)
21. DO LAUNDRY!! (Jess's, Jodys, Bullfrogs)
22. 7/16" tap for Marv
23. Roger on "Nay Nay"
24. Doug and Cami, Lane, Ashley
25. O'Reily?
26. Pick up Jack and 4-way from Lane at 4:00 pm

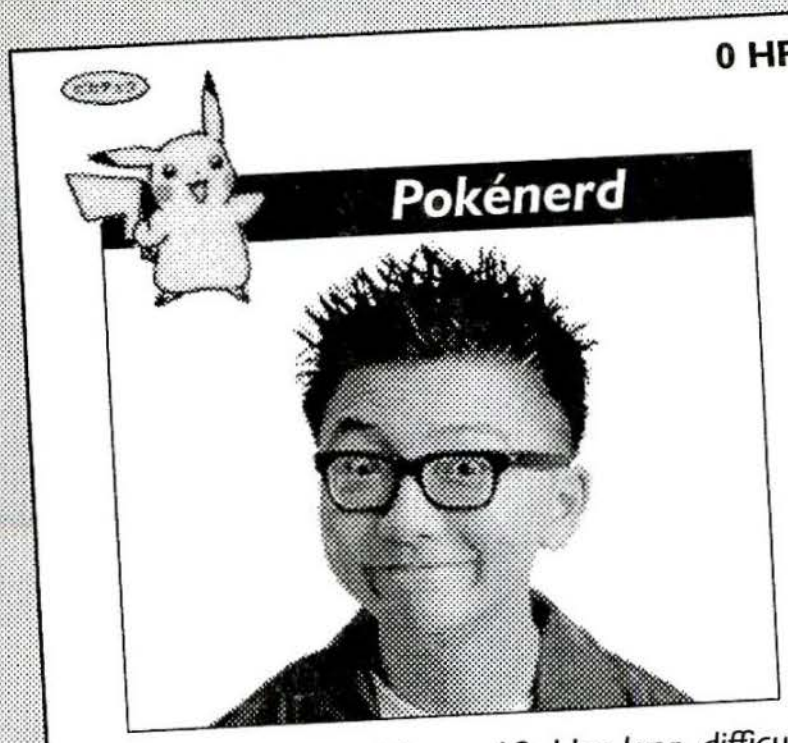
—Ken Davis



"Just how many fucking whales can one kid save?"

Gotta Catch a Clue!

The World's Last Pokémon Card



Usually male, roughly age 10. Has long, difficult life ahead of him. Is beat up frequently; no signs of subsiding in near future. Could use a haircut. Will never get laid. Will realize how much money he has wasted when it comes time to buy a car. Prone to seizures.

Cinematic Trends 2000

Are You Lookin' at Me?

Diamonds

Down to You

The Legend of Bagger Vance

Untitled Cameron Crowe

You've Got Wrong Mail

Instant Messaging = Instant Fun

As was established in last issue's "Accounting for Dummies," I'm always mistaken for someone else online. I get mail intended for other people all the time, but the real fun lies in stringing along those who instant message me and want to chat.

If I'm in the mood, I'll "play along" and be whoever it is they want me to be. My goal is for them to start thinking of that person in a totally different light within five minutes or less.

Here are undedited transcripts of a few recent encounters.

—Rod Lott

DavidEarlLottJr: Hi Granny!!!!!
RLott: Me corns is hurtin.
DavidEarlLottJr: We love you Granny! from david daniel and leah
RLott: RARRR! Leave me alone!
DavidEarlLottJr: Sorry we must have the wrong R Lott!
RLott: No wait! Love me!

JDngel: hey
RLott: Hey yourself.
JDngel: how everything
RLott: Who are you?
JDngel: jim
RLott: Jim who?
JDngel: deangelo duh
RLott: Oh, yeah, Jim Deangelo Duh.
RLott: How you been?
JDngel: good,is this rena ?
RLott: Yeah. I'm battling a bad yeast infection today.
JDngel: i was just checking my mail and saw you online
RLott: Any good mail today?
JDngel: no, nothing at all
RLott: You need to get on some good mailing lists.
JDngel: i dont spend much time on the computer
RLott: You should, there's plenty of porn to download! Ha! ;)
JDngel: berts at singing practice, heathers at work ,and lindsey is at a teen mania conference
RLott: Teen mania? Wassup wit dat?
JDngel: i have to pick up heather at 7;00 teen mania is who she went to india with
RLott: She didn't come back with a red dot on her forehead did she?
JDngel: no
RLott: What's Bert singing these days?
JDngel: gotta go i talk to you soon k
RLott: NO!!!!!!!
RLott: DON'T LEAVE ME!!!!!!
JDngel: please
RLott: NNOOOOOOOOO!!!!! DAMMIT!
RLott: I WILL KILL MYSELF!!!!!!
JDngel: sorry gotta pick up heather,,,if you kill yourself i hope its painless
RLott: NNNNNNNNNNNNOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!! WHO CARES ABOUT HEATHER — IT'S ALL ABOUT ME!
JDngel: you have gone crazy
JDngel: have you taken your prozak
RLott: MAKE THE VOICES STOP!!!
JDngel: see ya later
RLott: HAVE YOU CHECKED THE CHILDREN???
JDngel: bye

CHARDAB: Hi Rick. How is everything doing. See you at the DAA meeting later this month.
RLott: After I go to my AA meeting.
CHARDAB: Very funny——or maybe not.
RLott: It's okay — I can laugh at it now.
CHARDAB: Good for you. Hope Linda is well—you sure have a great wife—you must have done something right
RLott: Ah, she's okay. I could have done better.
CHARDAB: I will make sure I tell that to Linda next time I see her
RLott: It's okay — she knows.
CHARDAB: Has your hair grown out? Or are you still in campaign mode?
RLott: I'm growing it out, but the chemo's just gonna kill it anyway.
CHARDAB: Are you serious?—Having Chemo?
RLott: Yeah. My testes are laced with the big C.
CHARDAB: Very Sorry—but will beat it—too ornary (if thats the way you spell it).
RLott: That's "horny," not "ornary."
CHARDAB: OK—sound better that way—I know you are always right—I should say correct I guess
RLott: Believe it or not, the doc said the best thing to do is keep the plumbing clean, if you know what I mean.

CHARDAB: Well—got to go and let you finish whatever you are doing . Doctors orders sound reasonable and fun—keep up the good work
RLott: So what are you wearing?
CHARDAB: Lots of cat fur and you?
RLott: Nothing! Keep going...
RLott: ill type 1 handed
CHARDAB: LOL——
RLott: no joke
CHARDAB: Then bring in the clowns or whatever else is appropriate
RLott: iaogfbhey09853r4
RLott: Oh that was good.
CHARDAB: That was very quick
RLott: I started earlier. You had me at hello.
CHARDAB: LOL you sexy Democrat——talk to you later—Bye

got breastmilk?

By Ken Davis

Guys that are married will agree to do lots of things they wouldn't ordinarily do, all for the sake of keeping peace in the home. They'll do laundry (albeit not very well), eat their vegetables, even watch movies starring Julia Roberts.

For the sake of marital harmony, I agreed to accompany my pregnant wife to a two-session "Breastfeeding Your Baby" class. When she "asked" me to go with her, I resolved to go without complaint. I didn't balk at the idea, nor did I whine or moan. For you see, fellas, I've been married for more than seven years; I've learned to pick my battles, and this wasn't one I was willing to wage.

Upon arrival at Wesley Hospital's Birth Care Center, my wife and I made our way into the building where together we would learn how to squeeze and massage her breasts in order to express the nectar that is mother's milk. While walking inside, she commented, "You know, when you go to something like this, you can't help but look at everyone's breasts."

Forgetting that I was with my wife and not my cop buddies, I replied, "I do that anyway." I was quickly elbowed, and an audible gasp was expelled from my wife's mouth that I'm sure could be heard all the way up in ICU.

We made our way into Conference Room A, and were greeted by our instructor with the question, "Are you here for breastfeeding?" It was a setup that was much too easy. I wanted *sooo* badly to reply, "No, thanks, I've already eaten," or "Sure, take off your top." I remembered the previously mentioned elbow to the ribs, however, and bit my tongue. Instead, I just nodded.

She then instructed us to "Grab a baby!"

I turned my attention to a table on the back wall, which housed a dozen plastic babies. They were mostly Caucasian babies, but also represented were the token Asian baby and African-American baby. Each one was wrapped in a white blanket and they all had their mouths wide open, ready for an erect nipple to be placed into it. I perused the artificial tots and selected one, and we made our way to our seats. I sat down and quickly surveyed the breasts that already were assembled in the room.

We both were given name tags to wear and a folder containing numerous pamphlets and brochures. I began to survey the wealth of knowledge that had just been handed to me. There was information about breast pumps, "20 Great Reasons to Breastfeed Your Baby" and "Sore Nipple Management."

I thumbed through a brochure that had common questions parents ask about breastfeeding. One of them was, "My baby won't suck. She just lies there or falls asleep. What should I do?" Before I got to the answer, my mind suddenly flashed back to a girlfriend I had in high school. Not sure why.

Leak pads: Think of them as diapers for boobies. I'm guessing they'd also be great as coasters.

The instructor then introduced herself as Sue. She commanded us to write our name and phone number for her, as well as *her* name and home phone number for ourselves. She explained that if we left our packets, she'd know whose it was and could give us a call.

Although I didn't share my sentiments with her, I felt like I could probably move on in life without serious complications if I "accidentally" forgot to take our packet home. She said she also wanted us to have her number so that we could call her if we had any questions.

"Hey Sue, it's Ken Davis, from class," I played the phone call in my mind. "I know it's three in the morning, but I've got a question for you: Does my wife's nipple go *inside* my baby's mouth?"

Sue then explained the "class rules." She said that when she asks for feedback or questions from the group, it's okay to say "pass" or "ditto." She then went to the requisite oversized notepad on an easel and said she wanted everyone in the group to give her one question they wanted answered in the course of the class.

She started on the opposite side of the room from where my wife and I were sitting. By the time she got to me, all the "good" questions already had been asked. I seriously considered "passing." I mean, honestly, as a male, what question could I *possibly* ask without looking like a boob?[1]

I thought of a good one: "It's been said that girls are easier to potty train than boys. Does the same theory hold true with breastfeeding?" I asked.

Sue was taken aback by my query. Unlike all the other questions, she opted not to use her big Magic Marker to write it on the easel. Her voice animated with awe.

"That is a *great* question!" she exclaimed. "I

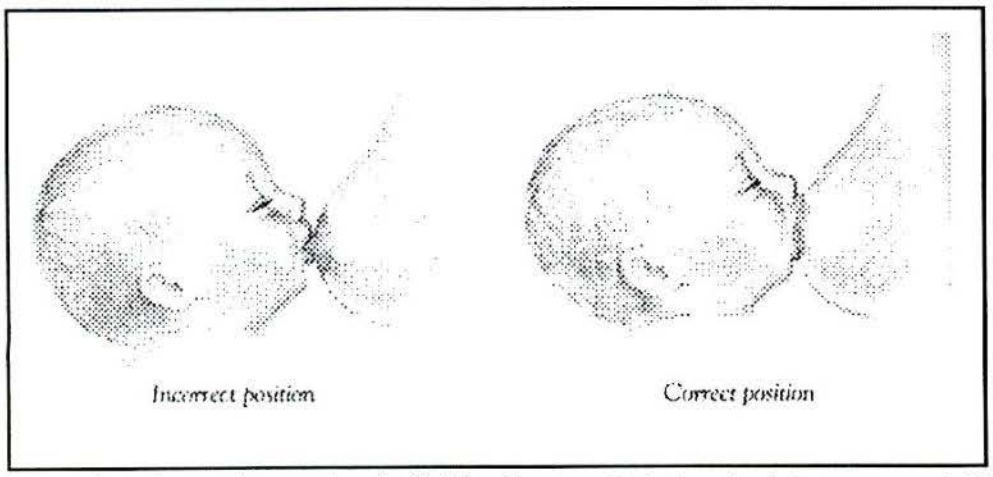
[1] My God, yes, pun intended.

don't think I've ever been asked that before. I've never seen a study on that, but that is something I'd be interested in knowing myself."

Oh, yeah, stumped the instructor.

I was feeling pretty good until the guy sitting next to me ruined it for the rest of the guys in the class. He played his "Hi, I'm Mr. Sensitive and I'm gonna get me some brownie points with the old lady" card by asking, "How do you get the father involved?" Sue answered his inquiry by saying she would be devoting a good part of week two answering that one.

The rest of the class was spent with Sue describing various methods to breastfeed a baby. She had a small pillow shaped like a breast that she used as a visual aid. The faux boob was complete with a silver-dollar-sized areola and accompanying large nipple. She quickly tired of the visual aid, though, and began to grope her own breasts during the demonstrations.



Normally, I would not be contrary to watching a woman touch herself in that manner. The problem I had with Sue doing it though was ... well, let's just say that Sue is no longer of childbearing age. In fact, her penchant for touching herself was actually quite disturbing. And she was not content with doing a solo act. She encouraged all the women in the class to follow her lead in pulling, tugging and squeezing their own breasts. It's safe to say that I was a little uncomfortable.

Prior to dismissing us, she gave the class some homework. She wanted us to read through the breastfeeding manual that she'd provided. She also wanted the women to check their nipples and let her know the next week whether or not they are inverted.[2]

The second week of class found us running a little late. We entered the classroom to find a video playing, extolling the ease with which women can breastfeed anytime, anywhere. The tape portrayed women whipping it out and providing nourishment to their newborns in all manner of scenarios. There was the lady who was breastfeeding while laying down in bed, the woman breastfeeding while typing away on a computer, another while gossiping on the telephone, and yet another while eating pizza.

I surveyed the room and estimated that the number of couples in attendance had dropped almost by half from the previous week. Perhaps it was because the women with inverted nipples were too ashamed to show up again and admit it in front of their peers.

As promised, Sue made good on her promise of letting us guys know what our role in this whole breastfeeding thing was going to be. She split us up into two groups – guys vs. gals. It should be noted that the splitting up of the men and women is inevitable in any class of this type. (The same thing happened when we took Lamaze classes nearly three years earlier before the birth of our son.)[3]

Both groups were given a large piece of paper and a marker, and asked to write down our own ideas of how the men could support the women when they are breastfeeding. Suggestions of "do laundry," "prepare meals," "change diapers" and "watch Julia Roberts movies" showed up on both lists.

I've got a problem with the whole "split up into groups and come up with your own ideas on what you are going to do to help your wife" thing. When we split up, I sat quietly and let the other guys in the group compile our list. However, when the list was presented to the females for their list was presented to the females for their approval, I suddenly was held liable for everything on the list, whether I agreed or not. The endorsing nods, laughter and applause from the females locked me into everything on the list. In the state of Kansas, where this class took place, the presentation of a list for the approval of a room full of pregnant women is more legally binding than a signed, written contract.

Don't get me wrong. I am willing and able to assist my wife in any way possible, especially in regards to our children. However, I resent having a group of guys I've never met before bargain for me. I don't remember paying any union dues for "Fraternal Order of Husbands of Pregnant Women." I'm a free agent and would have preferred to negotiate on my own.

Sue then brought out a cart laden with all manners of breastfeeding supplies. She passed around no less than 20 different "leak pads." For the uninitiated, leak pads are small pieces of round, absorbent cloth designed to be placed in the nursing mother's brassiere and used to soak up any milk that might embarrassingly escape from an engorged breast. Think of them as diapers for boobies. I'm guessing they'd also be great as coasters.

As the leak pads were being circulated, Sue posed a question that stumped us all: "When are a lady's breasts most likely to leak?" she queried. We had no idea.

"During sex!" she answered. She explained that the same process that causes orgasm also causes milk to be expressed from the breasts. "So," she wisely suggested, "when you're having sex, have a sense of humor and take a towel to bed with you."[4] Ahhh, romance.

She then trotted out a large array of breast pumps, from the most basic model all the way up to the most expensive. There were hand pump models, dual models designed to pump both breasts at the same time, battery-operated models and a diesel-engine-water-cooled model. There were several that would have made even Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor envious. She plugged one of them in and fired it up. I've heard jet engines quieter than this thing. It hummed and vibrated across the table, causing several of the women to giggle.

To demonstrate said breast pumps, she came prepared with a bag of balloons that would serve as dummy breasts. She solicited a male volunteer to select a few balloons and blow 'em up. She explained that she has an allergy to latex and was unable to handle the balloons without breaking into hives. I thought it would have been a hilarious twist of irony if she had announced that she also was lactose-intolerant.[5]

Once several balloons had satisfactorily been filled with hot air, they were passed around for us to try out in the pumps. The soft and supple balloons were stretched beyond recognition in the pumps. I'm still unsure how they didn't burst under the strain of being pulled and tweaked with such force. Based on what I saw, I don't know how any right-minded woman would ever even consider putting her tits into one of those things.

After demonstrating the breast pumps, she went on to explain how to store expressed milk. "Remember the rule of fives," she said, noting it can be stored at room temperature for up to five hours, in the fridge for up to five days, and in the freezer for up to five months.

How about the rule of "that's disgusting," which states that bodily fluids of any type should not be stored in the same airtight repository as foodstuffs?

After two weeks of looking at and discussing breasts, leak pads and pumps, my head was swimming. I went home with my wife to relax. Once there, I enjoyed a tall glass of 1% lowfat.

H

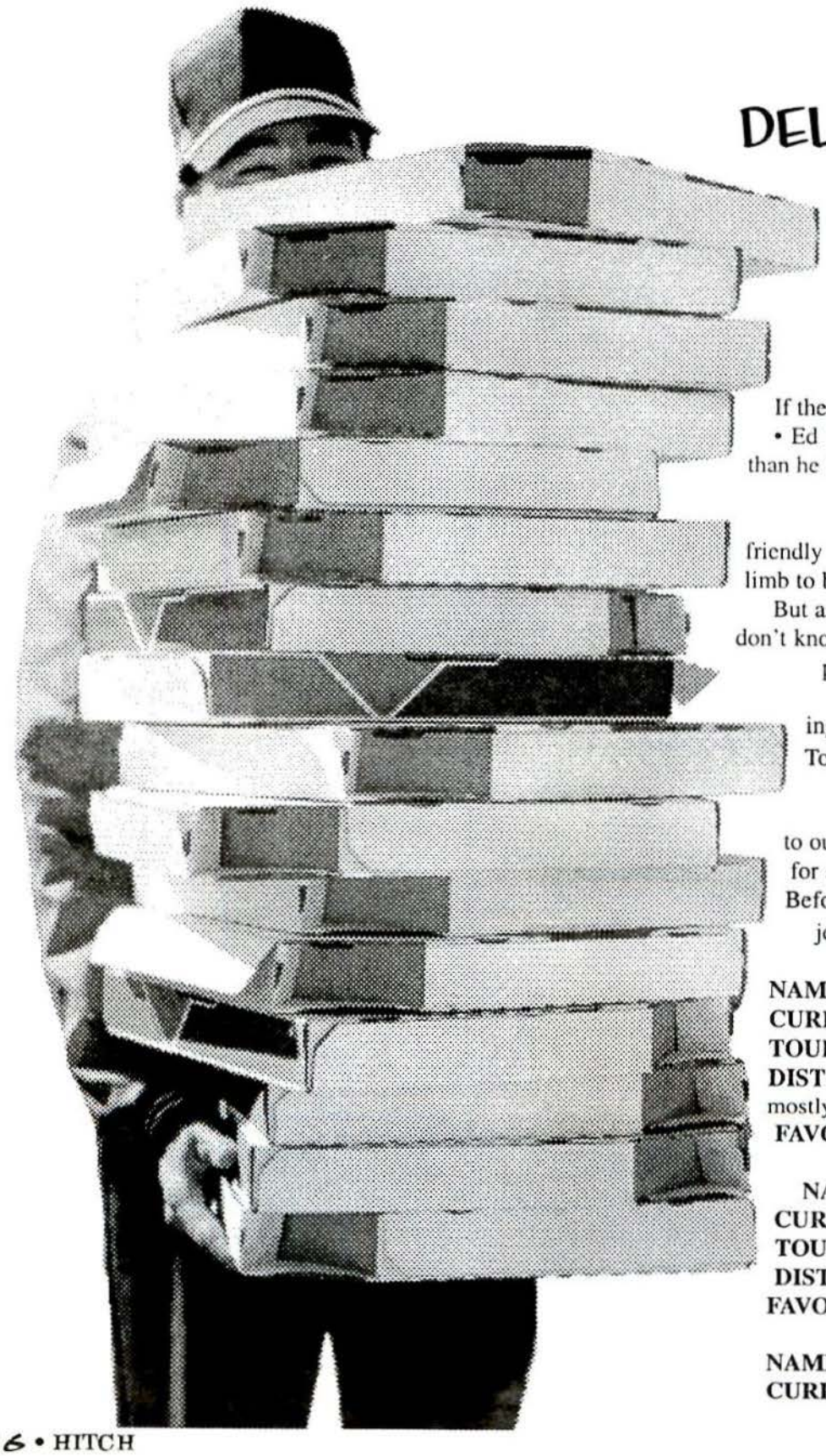
[2]What, no specific assignment for us men?

[3]See "Labor o' Love," HITCH 15.

[4]HITCH also recommends those plastic sneeze guards from the Western Sizzlin' salad bar.

[5]Though shaped very much like balloons, breasts do not emit ear-piercing shrieks when their ends are pinched.

PIZZA MAN CONFIDENTIAL



DELIVERY MEN'S JUICY SECRETS... WITH CHEESE ON TOP!

By Rod Lott

If the doorbell rings at my house, it better mean one of two things:

• Ed MacMahon has arrived with a big, fat check bigger and fatter than he is, or

• Pizza's here!

Who brings more joy to the lives of Americans than our friendly neighborhood pizza delivery men? Who else dares risk life and limb to bring their fine product right to your door? No one!

But as many times as pizza men have shown up at our addresses, we don't know anything about them. They deserve our respect, yet we simply hand them a crumpled dollar and shut the door.

Until now. We decided to give pizza men their due by offering them a voice so that they could tell us about their world.

To delve into the lives of pizza men, we at **HITCH** conducted a most unscientific experiment, ordering pizzas from three local chains in order to lure the delivery people to our lair, where they would have to answer questions in exchange for a check and tip.

Before you hear their tales from the front line, let's meet our subjects:[1]

NAME: Adam
CURRENT EMPLOYER: Mazzio's
TOUR OF DELIVERY DUTY: 1.5 years
DISTINGUISHING MARKS OR SCARS: Tattoo on left forearm, mostly covered by required uniform.
FAVORITE PIZZA: "Free."

NAME: Chuck
CURRENT EMPLOYER: Pizza Hut
TOUR OF DELIVERY DUTY: Two years.
DISTINGUISHING MARKS OR SCARS: At least four earrings.
FAVORITE PIZZA: Hawaiian with jalapeños.

NAME: Y'oussou
CURRENT EMPLOYER: Papa John's

TOUR OF DELIVERY DUTY: Five months

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OR SCARS: None visible.

FAVORITE PIZZA: Pineapple and beef.

As you'll soon see, the world of pizza delivery is far from an 8-to-5 grind. Nothing is routine; everything is unpredictable. As Adam said, "I've made like 6,000 or 7,000 deliveries, and you get the weirdest stuff, man. It's a circus out there. A circus."

Indeed, just prior to our interview, Adam had made a delivery in an apartment complex at which a day-long standoff was still underway – something involving a "wacko" lady who had shot off a paramedic's finger.

With that, we interrogated our three pizza men individually on various subjects involving their jobs – anchovies not included.

SEX!

As I'm told, pornographic films have long propagated the myth of the pizza man arriving at some young lovely's doorstep to deliver her food, and receiving a tip decidedly other than monetary. So obviously, this ubiquitous myth formed the core of our first question.

"I've had a lady come to the door in a towel," Adam said. "As a man, my natural instinct was just to try and get her money, but she leaned over and I got a little more than I expected. Lots of girls come to the door with just bras and shorts on. Not as modest as I am, I guess.

"I've had girls flash me. They asked, 'What are you doing tonight?' and I said, 'I'm married.' They said, 'What about *this?*'" he explained, simulating the motion of opening one's shirt to bare the chest region. "And I was like, 'I'm still married! I'm still married!'"

Chuck admitted to experiencing a similar situation.

"I've been met by a woman in a robe and nothing underneath," he said.

What happened?

"Nothing you couldn't copy outta *Penthouse* magazine," said Chuck, all talk.

Y'oussou, however, has yet to discover such on-the-job perks.

"Naked customer? No, I've never found naked customer," Y'oussou said.

CRIME!

Pizza men are more likely to be held up than propositioned, as the combination of unmarked bills and piping-hot pies proves irresistible to today's common thief.

"I got mugged. They didn't get my money, though," said Adam, proudly.

It happened last May at the Quail Lakes Apartments. "A guy asked me to borrow money for cigarettes and I said I didn't have any," he explained. "He hit me with a paddle on my wrists. It knocked the breath out of me. He hopped up like he was going to hit me again while I was down, but he took off."

Just last week, Adam had someone try to steal his money. Adam slipped in the rain, and his cherished pizza money packet went flying. In the resulting post-fall daze, some guy snatched it up. Adam "forgot" about it for a split second, but then grew frantic.

"When I picked myself up and turned around, it was just gone."

In dire contrast to the "OUR DRIVERS CARRY LESS THAN $20" claim, the packet contained about $200 at the time. Since Adam was supposed to have approximately $180 less on him, he knew he would be fired over the lost cash if it wasn't found.

The only man in sight retreated quickly once he was caught by Adam's eye. Adam found his beloved packet behind an air conditioning unit; he reasoned the man ditched it to avoid confrontation after he realizing he had been seen.

No doubt due to his brief time on the job, Y'oussou not only hasn't come across sex, he hasn't come face to face with the criminal element, either.

"I've never been robbed, thanks, God. But sometimes I am in crazy people's houses, like in WestPark Village or the Colonades," he said, listing a litany of complexes and additions which he finds spooky. "I no like to be in those places."

ANGRY CUSTOMERS!

For the most part, pizza men are treated like kings – nay, gods – by the fine people whose houses to which they deliver. Rare is the irate consumer, but he does exist.

"I was late on a delivery, during March Madness, when *everyone* wants a pizza," Adam said. "This guy comes to the door swearing and yelling at me for being late, so I gave it to him for free; it was an hour old. But he called my work and told them I cussed him out.

"I have never gotten angry at a customer," he said. "Now, I might say things to myself on the way out..."

That experience probably paled in comparison to another encounter he had.

"I've delivered to some ex-girlfriends before," he admitted. "That was an experience."

So what happened?

"Aw, nothing much," he said, looking down at his shoes, clearly withholding the truth.

AND, OH YEAH, PIZZA!

One would think that pizza men would be repulsed by the very thought of the food which they smell and shuttle all the live long day and night. But no.

"I love pizza! I eat it five days a week, sometimes six," said Adam, who admitted to preferring the thin crust of Domino's, a competitor of the company that signs his checks.

Chuck said, "Yeah, I like pizza. We get it free. We also get insurance, too – health, life and dental. It's awesome."

But he likes his job more for a simpler reason: "Tips."

Not wanting to go into much detail, Y'oussou responded that "yes," he, too, enjoys the taste of a fine pizza pie, and ran off toward his car, like a shooting star in the night sky, rip-roarin'-ready and eager to spread his mozzarella magic to other hungry neighbors of the greater metro area.

Or maybe he just thought I was about to rob him. **H**

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[1]Names of the pizza men have been changed to protect their jobs and not to raise the ire of jealous spouses and/or significant others.

Let's Talk Turkey

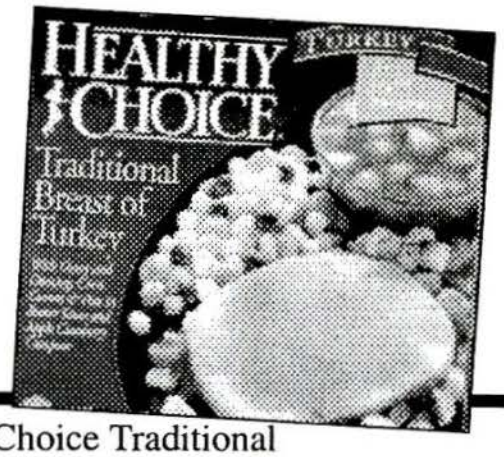
In the tradition of killing and cooking what was almost our great nation's symbol, it's turkey time again. And whether it be for Thanksgiving or Christmas, the abundant bird is a special treat for the whole family for many meals.

But what about today's single adult who will not be with family this joyous holiday season? The reasons are endless, including but not limited to: living several time zones away, grunt status on the work vacation totem pole, fear of giving in to uncontrollable urges to make flippant remarks about family traditions, parents' inability to deal with offspring's homosexuallity, etc.

Whatever the reason, it is possibly lamentable that the young single adult will miss the fantastic feast that is the well-adjusted family holiday dinner. So to help those on their own, we at **HITCH** have taste-tested several prepared turkey dinners to see if their convenience is worth the sacrifice. Here's what we found.

—Jamie Rogers

Meal Name	Banquet Value Menu Turkey Meal (Mostly White Meat)
Portions	9.25 oz. turkey and gravy with dressing, mashed potatoes and peas in seasoned sauce
Cooking Time	25-30 min.
Box Promise	"Satisfying meals that'll bring them to the table and keep them coming back for more."
Price	$1.69 regularly; on sale for .80 in 4 for $4 deal
Pre-Meal aroma	Little aroma, slight hint of "cafeteria."
Presentation	Despite warning that failure to use a cookie sheet could catch the house on fire, paper tray was unburned. Many peas looked like shriveled raisins. Turkey in small half-moons. Rogue pea died in desert of dried gravy.
Taste	Wizzened peas actually quite flavorful with help of oil-slick "butter." Potatoes seemed untouched by human hands. Gravy either very flavorful or salty; couldn't decide. Crouton "stuffing" cubes were firm yet chewy. Turkey had discouraging small water pocks that revealed the processing. Gravy tasted better than turkey.
Zipper Meter	Zero – Finished meal in five minutes and was ready to eat again immediately.
Sleepy?	Not real turkey, so no.
Weird Ingredient	Dark turkey, mechanically separated turkey
Overall	Rather than donate plasma, I would scrounge up .80 for this meal.

	
Swanson Hungry Man Turkey (Mostly White Meat)	Healthy Choice Traditional Breast of Turkey
16 3/4 oz. turkey, gravy and stuffing, mashed potatoes, peas and apple-cranberry dessert	10.5 oz. turkey with gravy, corn, carrots and peas in butter sauce and apple cranberry compote
35 min.	25-30 min.
"Swanson skillfully blends selected ingredients to give you great taste and qualtiy at a great price."	"We make it easy for you to feel good about eating the great tasting foods you love."
$3.39	Regularly $3.49; on sale for $2.50
Flirty, with a hint of onion or sage.	The best-smelling of all three meals, it carried more of a vegetables-and-bread smell.
The 50-percent-more-meat promise was evident. Portions looked too big to be true. Nice floral accents on the paper tray made me feel like I was eating on mom's good plates.	Disappointment at lack of potatoes was amplified by crazy aray of corn spilling into each of the three compartments. Black food tray looks tasteful *and* trendy.
Dark meat was better than light. Processed meat slabs hid buried treasure of stuffing mound. Potatoes were good when dipped in excess gravy. Peas okay. Apple-cranberry dessert was so delicious I turned my fork around to dig out resilient red jelly clinging to pocket to get last bites.	Mixed vegetables quite good. Butter flavor on baby carrots is yummy. Despite big celery chunks, stuffing was like a flavorless sponge. Rubbery turkey tasted passable only when covered in gravy. Dessert would have tasted better without all the corn in it. Could not decipher if chunks were all apples, some cranberries or what.
10 – Shared with husband and still felt full.	3 – Maybe if you're wearing skin-tight Calvins.
Maybe 500 calories at 10 p.m. isn't a good idea.	Urge for Coke not releated to turkey consumption.
Stuffing: dough conditioners (ascorbic acid, cysteine hydrochloride, azodicarbonamide)	Orange juice concentrate.
Too much man for me to handle.	Holiday dinners just don't do well low fat, folks.

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?

I DO! I DO!

By Rod Lott

Who wants to be a millionaire?

Hell, who *doesn't?* Asking that is as rhetorical as "Care for a stick of gum?" and "Who likes sex?"

You might think it sad that I have memorized the phone number to qualify for appearing on ABC's runaway hit game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, but you'd be wrong. Sad is not having to consult the Yellow Pages for the suicide hotline. Sad is having Waffle House takeout on speed-dial. But knowing by heart a string of 11 digits that could potentially result in a windfall of Benjamins into my otherwise meager bank account? That's pursuit of a dream, baby!

I've called daily since the November sweeps began, punching my touch-tone phone until my right-index phalange has worn closer to the bone, putting in correct order newspapers in relation to their city of printing, hairdos from their date of introduction and albums according to their year of release. I've qualified a number of times, but have yet to receive the fated phone call that results in the free trip to New York City ... *yet.*

Some off you may scoff at my quest for an easy, cool mil and ask, "Rod, wouldn't you be better off in your pursuit of wealth by taking the advice of John Houseman and get rich the old-fashioned way by *earning* it?"

And to that, I would answer: 1) John Houseman is dead, and 2) How much credence can one place in the words of a guy who had a recurring role on *Silver Spoons*?

Besides, by *earning* money, you don't get to do so while having Regis Philbin ask you trivia questions.

Although the chances of me getting in the hot seat opposite Regis are as astronomical as Denise Richards getting cast as a nuclear physicist – oh, wait a second, bad analogy – I have caught myself already planning my life as if it were going to happen.

"Do you want to go to a movie on Friday?" I was asked.

"Yeah, sure," I answered, "unless I'm in New York that day for *Millionaire*."

Or, "Rod, do you think you can have that presentation about 80% done by Wednesday?"

"No problem, provided I'm not on *Millionaire* then."

(Note to any producers of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* who might be reading this column: Please don't prepare any questions for me that might have to do with movies, television, music or any other hobbies of a 28-year-old male from Oklahoma City, because I don't know *a single thing* about those. Instead, bring on the world geography and complex algorithms, which I eat, drink and sleep!)

If I got on the show, not only do I think I would get close to the six-zero prize, but I think Regis would be so impressed with me that he'd invite me out to a swank tavern for drinks afterward.

"Thanks for inviting me, Mr. Philbin," I would say graciously, hoping he'd pick up the tab.

"Please, call me Reege," he would say. "What'll you have?"

"A gin and tonic, please," I would answer.

"A gin and tonic," he would repeat, with dramatic pauses. "Is that your final answer?"

And then we would both erupt into a fit of laughter. "Oh, Reege, you rascal! Do you *ever* stop?" I would say. Three rounds of liquor later, he'd be regaling me with ribald tales of lusting over Kathie Lee's ample bosom.

"Lemme tell ya, that Cody was one lucky baby, if ya know what I mean," he'd slur, accompanied by a crooked wink of one eye.

I know this would happen because I'm not like the other contestants who have appeared on the show's brief run thus far. For example:

- I'm not a lawyer, attorney or government employee.
- I wouldn't make some stupid gesture to the camera when they'd introduce me.
- I can fit in the chair.
- Most importantly, I'd get straight to the point. No lengthy and unnecessary explanations of obvious answers. All too often, you hear would-be *Millionaire*s saying things like, "Well, I should know this, Regis. I have a cousin that lives in Atlanta who is a veterinarian's assistant. And she was in Boise for a trade show last June, where unfortunately, she tripped on a curb and fractured her hip. She ended up having to stay the entire week in a local hospital, where they doped her up with meds and she watched TV all day. One of the programs she watched went, I believe, by the name of *Sesame Street*, and I think I remember her telling me about this one particular episode dealt with the letter 'K,' and how in the alphabet, 'K' comes before 'L,' so I guess my answer would be for 'K.'"

"'K' before 'L'?" Regis says.

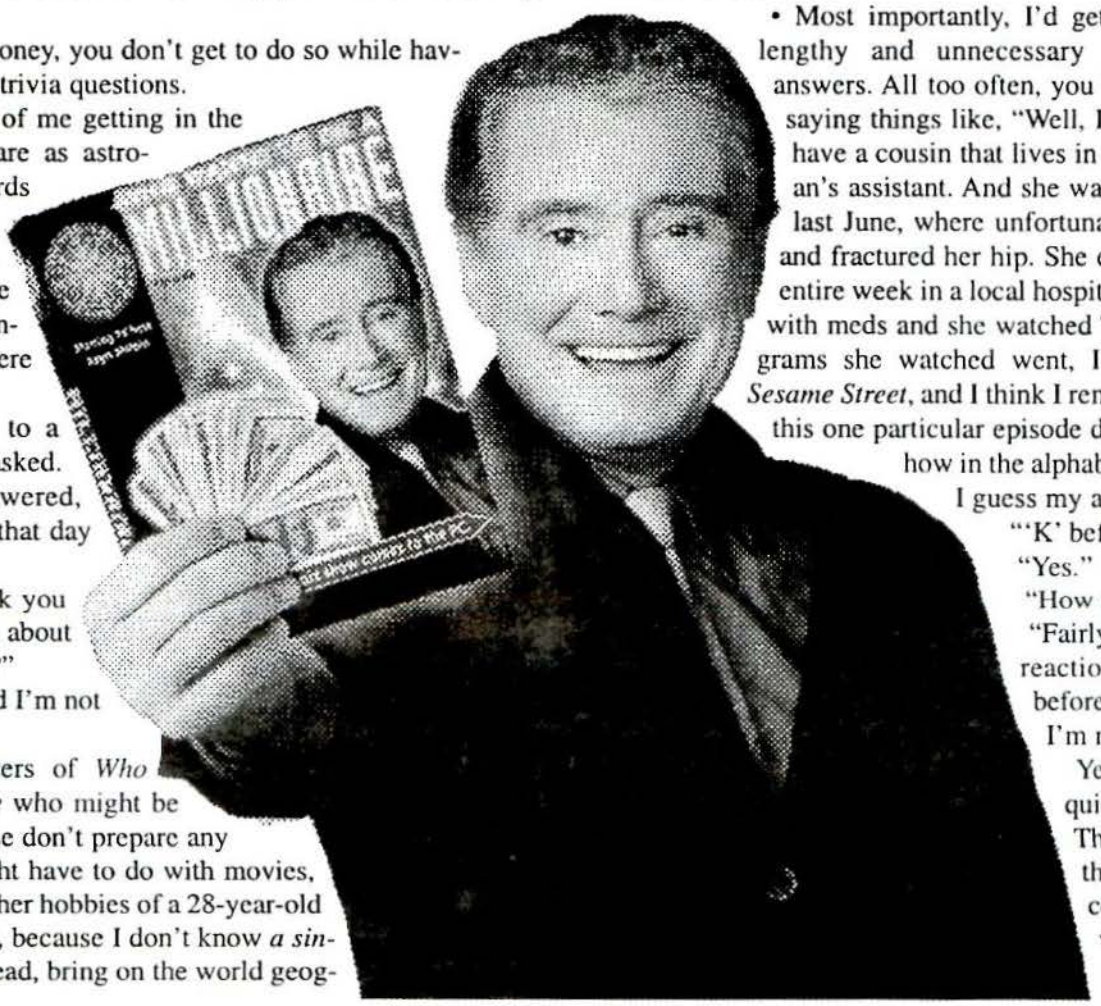
"Yes."

"How confident are you?"

"Fairly confident. I mean, my gut reaction was that 'M' comes before 'L,' but after talking it out, I'm now leaning toward 'K.'"

Yes, you can count on me for quick, no-nonsense responses. The stream-of-consciousness thing is something I just could not do to the American viewing public.

Not for a million dollars. H



HAVE YOU SEEN "THE #1 CHRISTIAN MOVIE IN AMERICA?" I MEAN, HAVE YOU SEEN IT?

A HITCH COMICS UNOFFICIAL MOVIE ADAPTATION

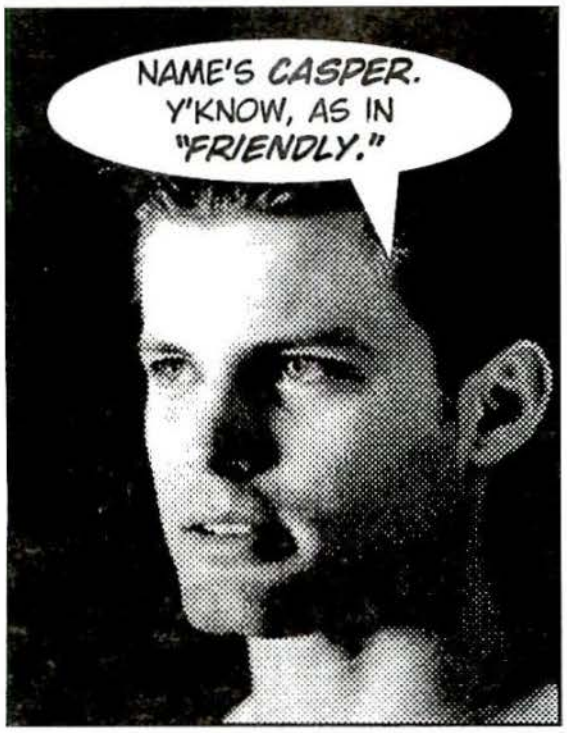
THE OMEGA CODE

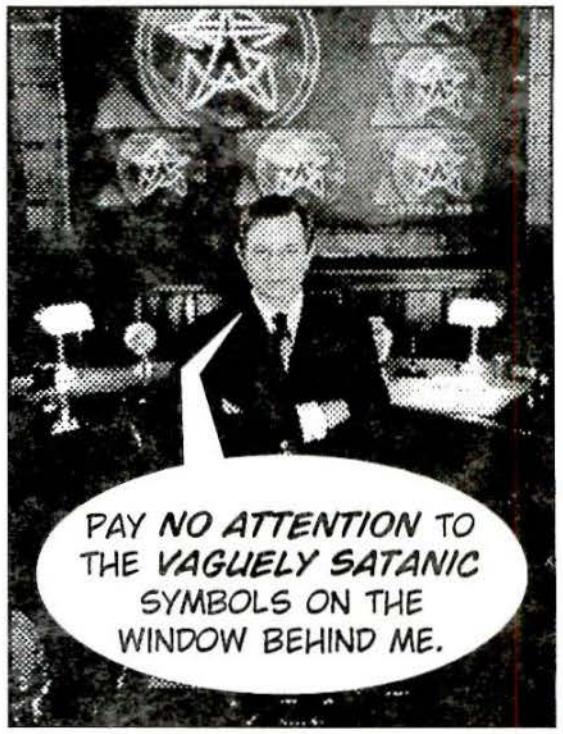
HITCH COMICS GROUP

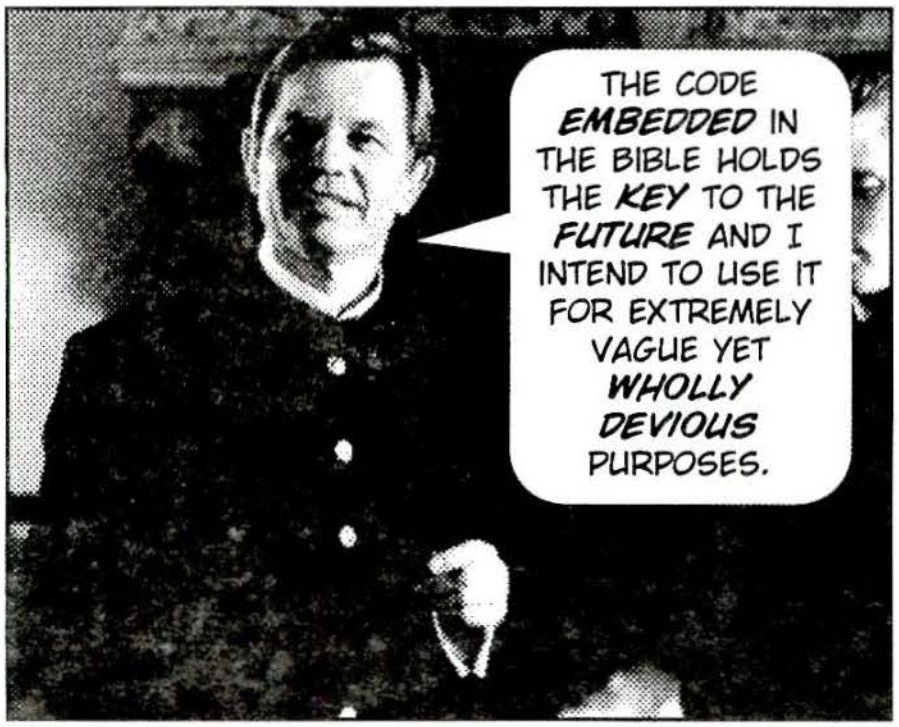
IT'S UP TO THIS MAN TO SAVE THE WORLD. YOU'RE, LIKE, SOOO SCREWED.

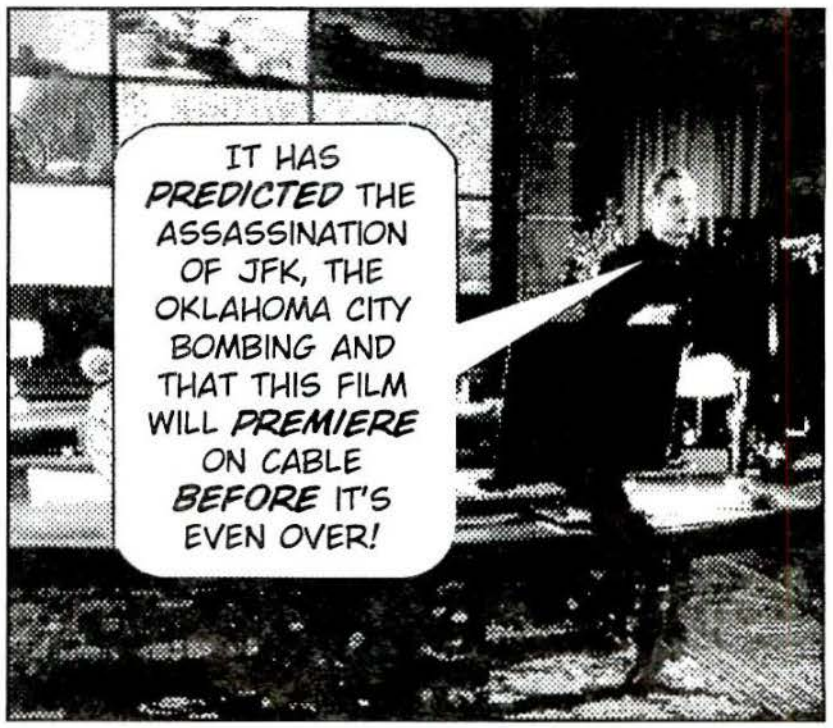
WELL, NOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO! WE'VE ADAPTED IT FOR YOU IN EASY-TO-READ COMIC-BOOK FORM!

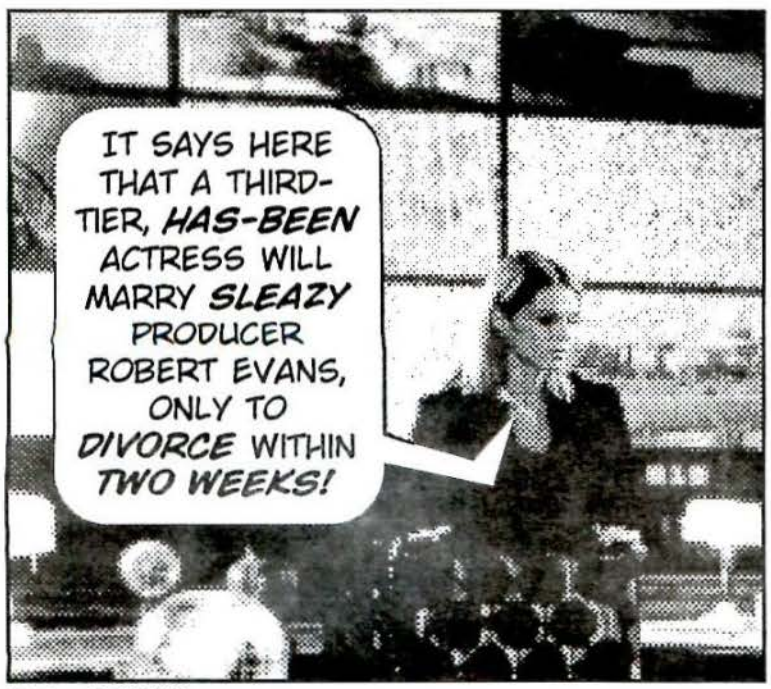
OUR STORY BEGINS WITH THREE PEOPLE CAUGHT UP IN THE OMEGA CODE...



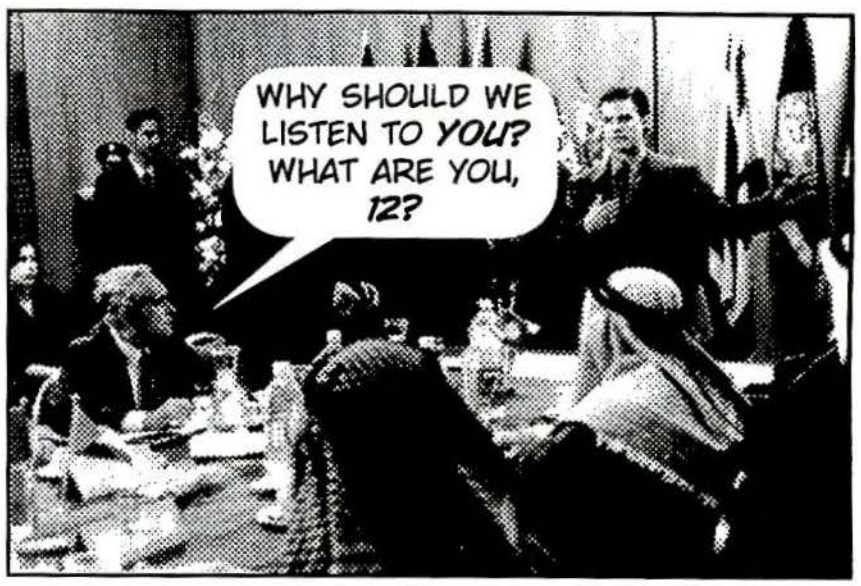



THE CODE EMBEDDED IN THE BIBLE HOLDS THE KEY TO THE FUTURE AND I INTEND TO USE IT FOR EXTREMELY VAGUE YET WHOLLY DEVIOUS PURPOSES.


IT HAS PREDICTED THE ASSASSINATION OF JFK, THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING AND THAT THIS FILM WILL PREMIERE ON CABLE BEFORE IT'S EVEN OVER!



LATER....
GENTLEMEN, AS YOU KNOW, WE *MUST* DO *SOMETHING* ABOUT THE OMEGA CODE!


WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN TO *YOU?* WHAT ARE YOU, *12?*

DID YOU SEE *TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY?*

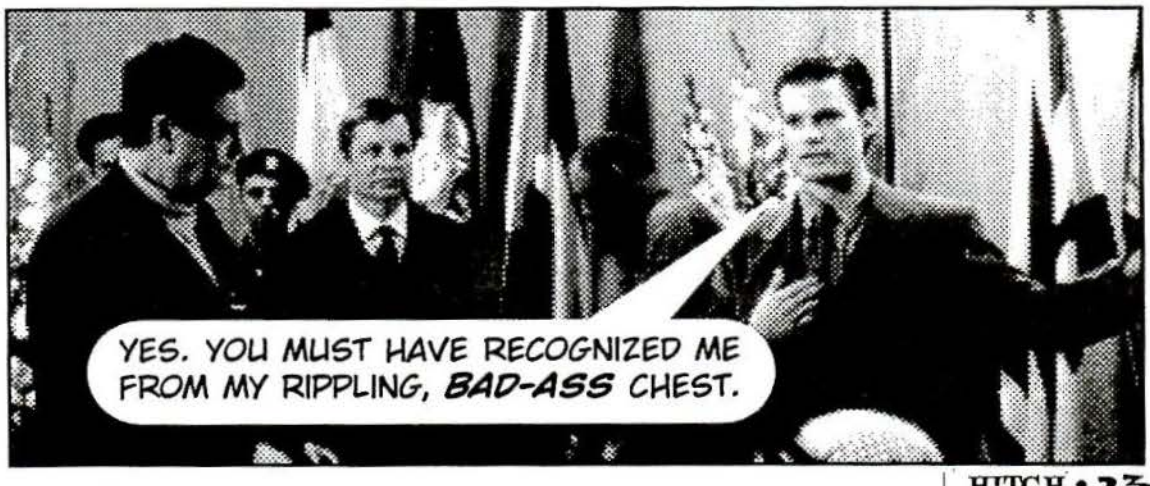
NO.

WELL, I WAS IN THAT. ... I PLAYED TARZAN. HERE, LISTEN: *AAAAHHHAHYAYAHAHYA!*

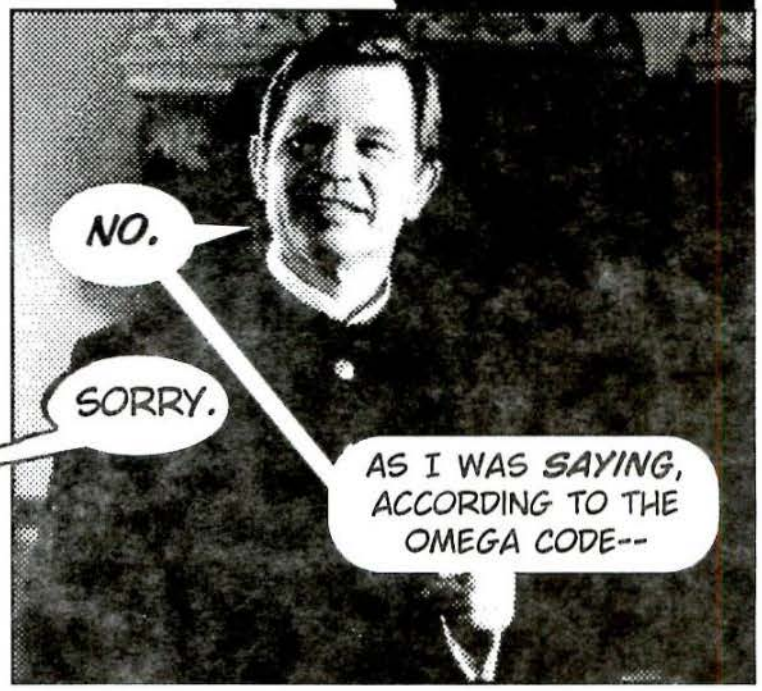
UH-HUH. *WHAT THE HELL* WAS *THAT?*

THE TARZAN YELL.
DIDN'T IT MAKE YOU *COWER WITH FEAR?*

WAIT, I KNOW. WEREN'T YOU IN *STARSHIP TROOPERS?*


YES. YOU MUST HAVE RECOGNIZED ME FROM MY RIPPLING, *BAD-ASS* CHEST.

FREEZE, BUGS!



I KNOW, I KNOW. ACCORDING TO THE OMEGA CODE, I AM *PRETTY.*
NO, ACCORDING TO THE OMEGA CODE, *SATAN* IS DUE TO WALK THROUGH THAT DOOR *ANY SECOND!*

H

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HITCH

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RICH PRINGLE'S FUN 'N' GAMES

Hey, y'all – Rich Pringle here! I no it's ben awhile since I core-a-sponded with ya, but I ben doin' a 3-ta-5 up state for a little in-sa-dent invovlin' some Polaroids and a couple-a' honeys from Beaver Elementry. I think it's really called Southside Elementry, but I like ta call it Beaver, if'n ya kach my drift.

But anny way, I'm hear ta tell ya that prizin life is awful dull. If'n I wazn't playin' bones with Lloyd and Rastus in tha pod, I waz dodgin' the frooty tipes in tha shower room once a week.

Games iz a big part of what we do in the Sasquatch Kountee Korrekchunal Fasilitee. There's bones, spades, hearts and some bored games which'n I kouldn't kwite ever get inta. We kould only wach TV for an hour or two a day, an' even' then the colored boys'd wach footbal or bassketbal. No NASCAR or mud bogs n' such!

Reedin's kinda hard two, ya no, so I took ta makin' games for myself to pass tha tyme. Hear's some of my faverites that I think all y'all get a reel kick outta. Go on now, get ta' gamin'!

WERD SERCH

This one's a doozy! What you gotta do is find werds hiden in the mix! It'll take some doin' and ya gotta have pashunse and a set a' eyes like a tweeked-up eegel.

FIND: Pabst, Blue, Ribben, Poon, Blow, Truck, Poorno, Tar, Pa, Rakoon, Swab, Shower, Herpees, Stone, Cold, Steve, Austin, Scabies, Beer, Young, Moonshyne, Vasaleen, Sex, Nuts, Beever, Wreckedem, Fense, Bone, Cro

A R I B B O N Z U T H
P O O N L I B R A R Y
O R S T O N E O S U A
O A H U W S E M A C A
R K O H C C R O L K U
N O W E O A Y O E X S
O O E R L B O N E B T
T N R P D I U S N L I
A S T E V E N H L U N
R W Z E H S G Y S E X
P A B S T F E N S E Z
A B W R E C K E D E M
Z B E E V E R N U T S

MATCH 'N' SAY

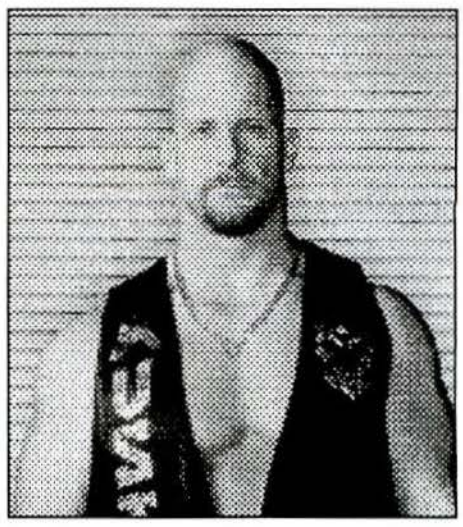
Here's my favirit game. Whatcha do is take some of my best most impressive sayins and put 'em together like a puzel. Then member 'em and use 'em later in any sichyouashun. Think of it as pushups for yer noggin'!

(A) than a (B) (C)

A	B
Sicker	rabbet
Happyer	man
Hornyer	dog
Faster	woman
Badder	toddler
Crazyer	Stone Cold Steve Austin

C

in a Messican horehouse.
wit' a set of bull's balls.
wit' a case of the squats.
in an ass-sniffin' contest.
with a gutful o' goolash.
in a match bahtween Gravedigger, Undertaker, Goldberg and three half-drunk crippels.

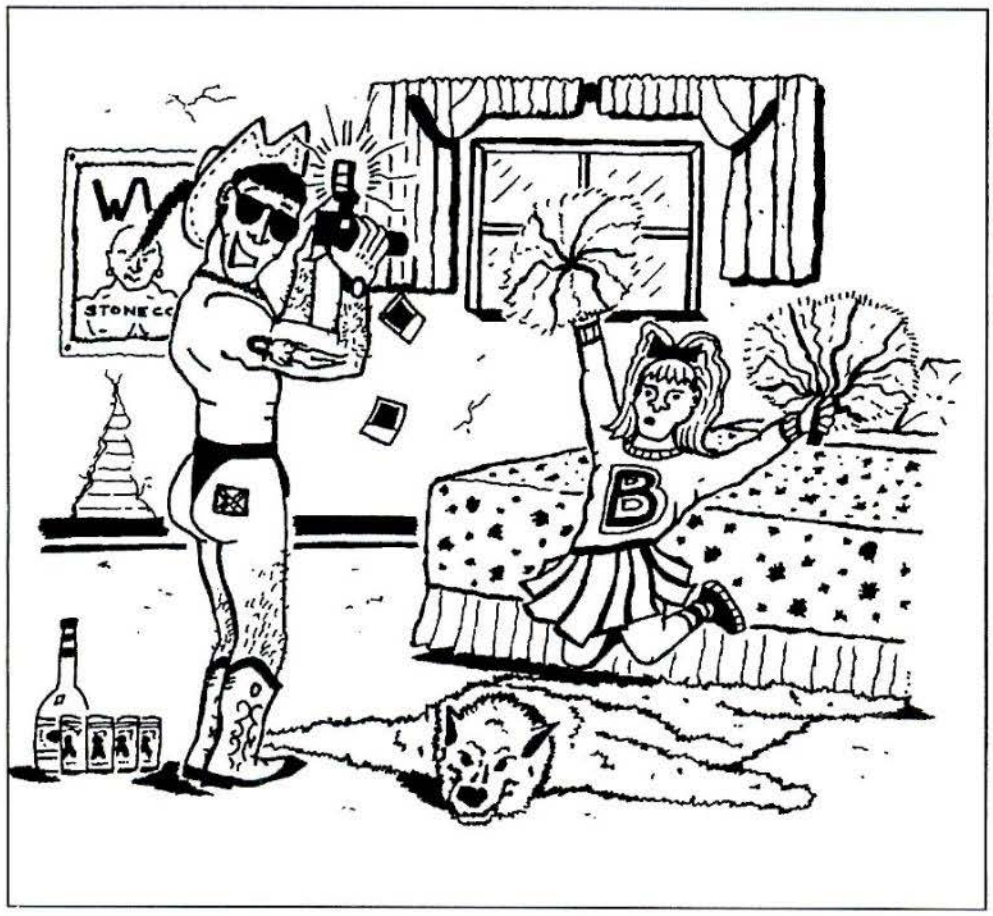


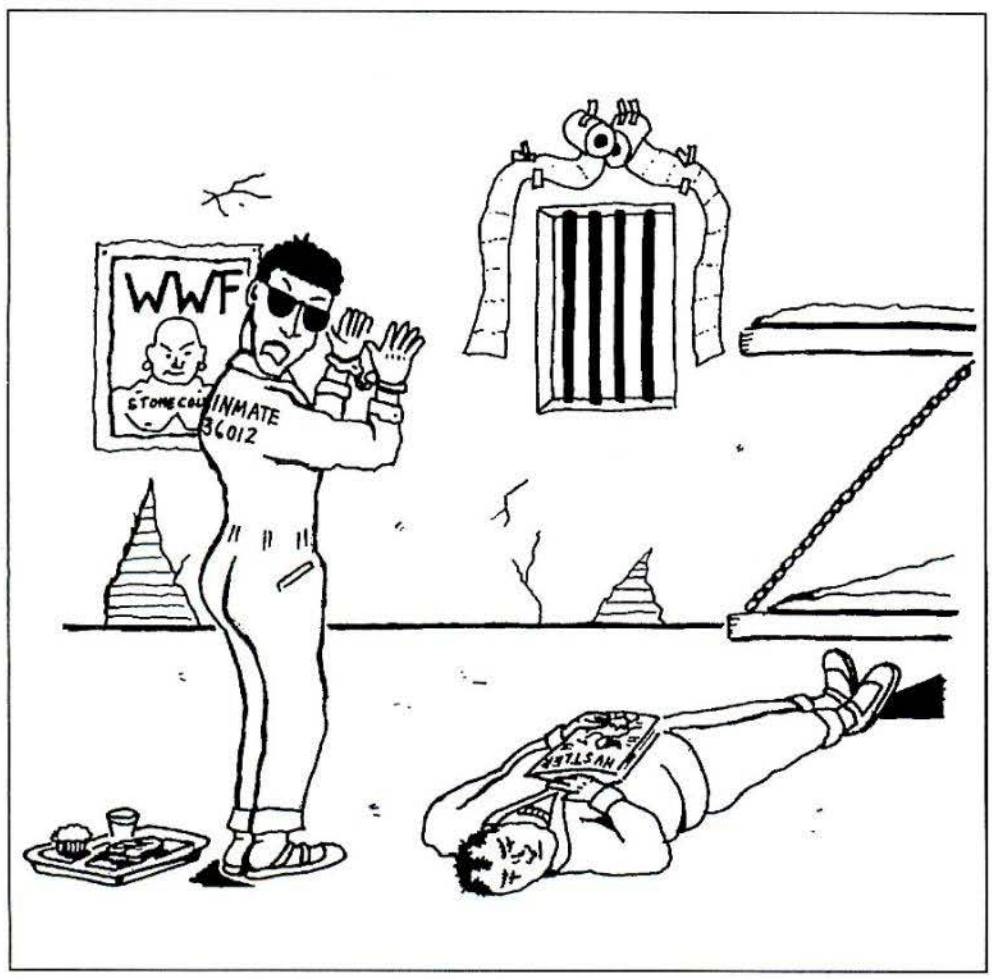
STONE COLD SEZ: "THEM GAMES IS FUN!"

SPOT THE DIFFRENSE

This here's one of them sets of piktures that one of 'em's kinda diffrent an' you gotta spot what it is that's kinda off-kilter. One of the piktures is pre-tryell, one of 'em's after my sentunse.

Have a hoot!





SHOOTS 'N' DOGGONNITS

This game is one I played fer ours. The obbjeckt is ta' get the hooters at the end of the rale.

It ain't so easy, though, cauz there's all sorts of shoots, dagblastits and doggonnits along the way.

Find a pinny or other coyn ta' flip. Flip a heads, move one space. Flip a tailes, move two.

Find somethin' ta' use fer a game peece like a bean or pee. I used a peece a' corn I saved from dinner a while ago.

Have fun and doggonit, bee carefull!

Land on:

Meth lab: Whoopsy dazy! You mixed yer kemikals rong! Yer meth lab done blowed up. Go back one space.

DHS: Happy days! Yer publik assistense check come in, you got food fer weaks too. Yer safe, so flip agin!

Stone Cold: Boo yah! The master of dizaster done broke yer neck. Go back to the start.

Liker store: Bingo! Ya got a chance ta' get lit up. Drink all the Kentuky Derbee ya can an' flip agin!

Jale: Doggonit, ya got caut drivin' while entoxicated. Or yer wife called the poleese when ya smaked her fer runnin' her jaw. Go back two spaces.

Hooters: You win! Stay a spell an' enjoy yer funbags. You done urned it.

Slip 'n' slide: Go on now, slide back on down ta' them hooters. Whatcha waitin' fer?

KROSSWERD PUHZLE

An' finly, tha dooziest of the doozies! I've done given you tha clues. All's you haveta do is fill in tha corect werds in them there boxes koruh-spondin' to them there nummers.

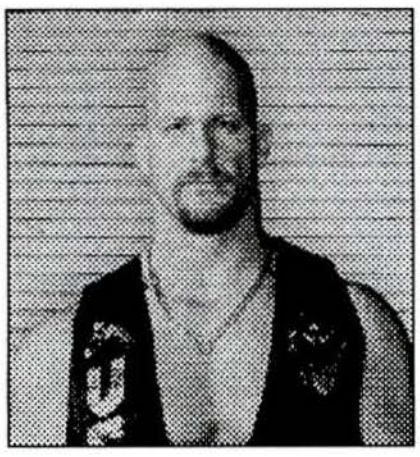
I've even inclooded tha answers, but don't you dare go peekin', ya hear?

AKROSS

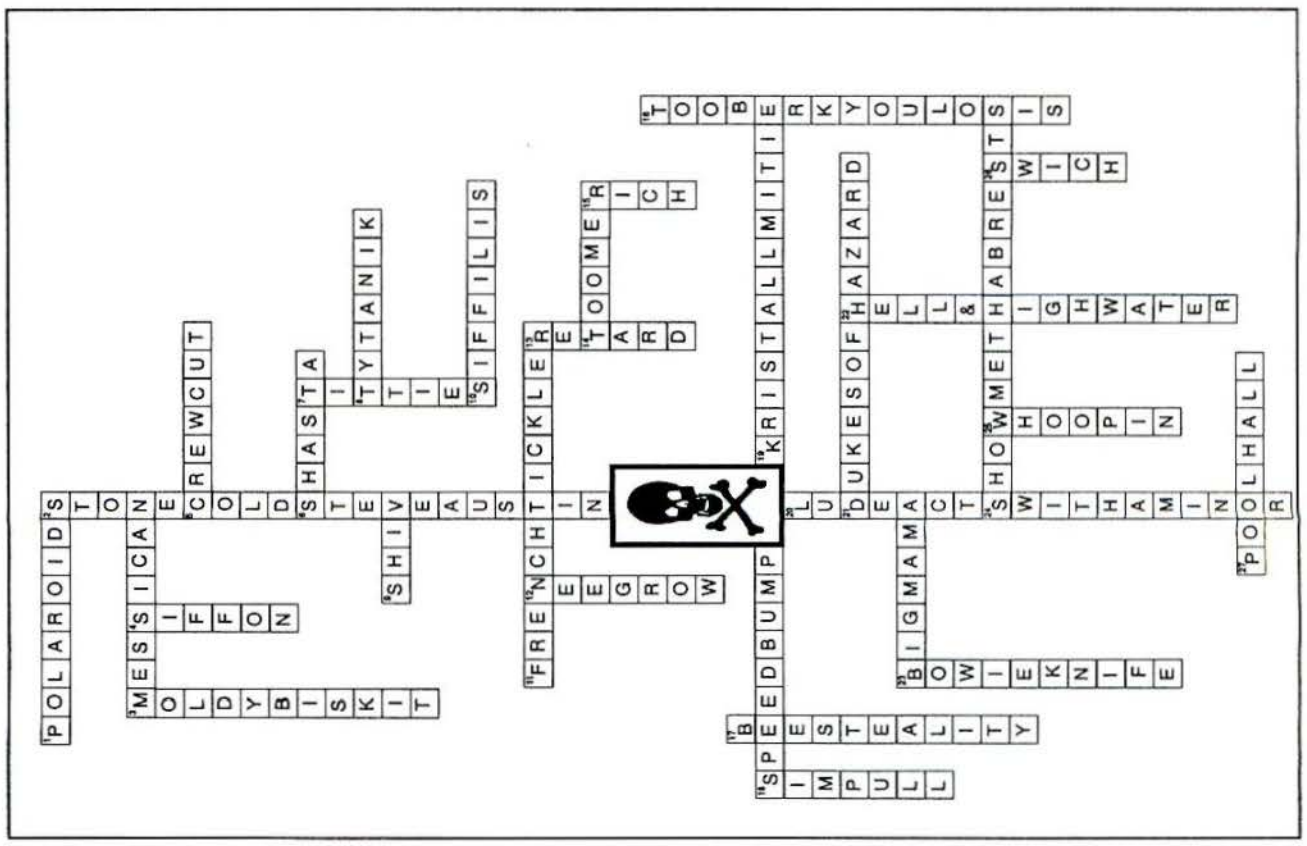
1 Evedense used in my kort kase; exibits A-W.
3 Them folks that like burritos 'n' stuff.
5 My buddy's nikname, on the kount that his hare is so short.
6 Werld's gratest soda pop.
8 That moovee with them sinkin' boats an' them people that talk all funny-like.
9 Whut prizin guys call a nife.
10 Whut my sellmate Lloyd had that got 'em so sick.
11 Devise ya use ta make tha ladees skreem.
14 Lump that shows up in wimen's boobys.
18 Whut them frooty types call himeroids.
19 Whut I say when I hit mah foot on a rok.
21 My favirit show when I's a youngun, with that orange car and them too good ol' boys.
23 Tha ladees that's kinda round.
24 Whutchoo say when ya see a ladee ya like; copeed it frum that moovee where Tom Cruz is that colored boy's ajent.
27 My favirit place ta hoot 'n' holler on the out side.

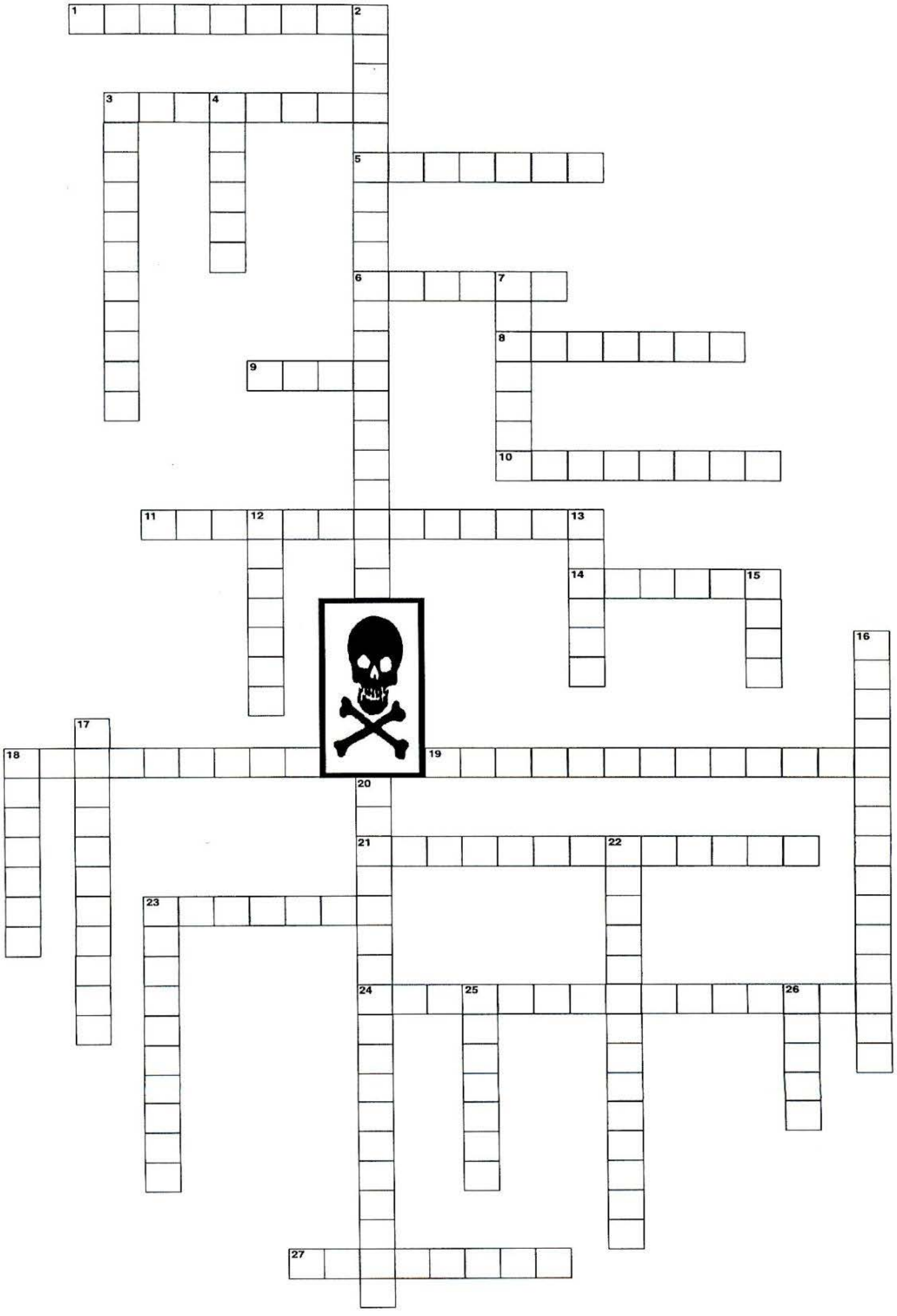
DOWN

2 Werld's gratest wrasslin' champeun.
3 Whut priziners call turds.
4 How I get my gas ta' dryve with.
7 My sekond favirit thing about tha ladees in tha hole werld.
12 Them folks that are good at baskitball.
13 Them folks that's kinda slo in tha hed.
15 My nikname (hint: $$$).
16 That coffin' dizeeze that's goin' 'round the jale.
17 Whut that one funny guy is always mumblin' 'bout, how he likes doin' tha nasty with livestok.
19 Whut that prizin shrink called me when I seen him last munth.
20 Whut the korts found me gilty of.
22 Tha fraze I use when I say nuthin's gonna keep me from doin' nuthin'.
23 Big pig stiker.
25 Whut you'll git if you tangel with Mr. Stone Cold hisself.
26 Whut mah daddy usta beet me with.



STONE COLD SEZ: "DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!"





LIVIN' LA VIDA 8-BALL

CAN ONE REPORTER LIVE LIFE ACCORDING TO A NOVELTY TOY? CHANCES ARE YOU WILL READ ON TO FIND OUT...

By Ryun Patterson

Decisiveness isn't my strongest character trait. Sometimes, even the simplest day-to-day quandaries turn into life-and-death, existence-of-God, Coke-vs.-Pepsi issues for me.

So one day, in the middle of perilous falling prices at a discount retailer, I spied my salvation. It was called the "Magic 8-Ball," and it promised to wash the pain out of my diurnal dilemmas. Conveniently enough, the packaging allowed me to sample its arcane foreknowledge. So I shook the globe and asked it a toughie.

"Should I eat at McDonald's tonight?"

MY SOURCES SAY NO, the triangular message emerged from a liquid blue murkiness.

"Burger King, then?"

IT IS DEICIDEDLY SO

With this in mind, I left the store, buying neither tube top nor snow tires (both of which appeared to be top sellers), and got some grub.

It hit the spot.

So I returned and shelled out the five bucks for this miraculous little timesaver. As Alfred E. Neuman would say, "Cheap!"

If I only knew the price it soon would exact on my soul. The weekend, however, went fine.

"Boxers today?"

DON'T COUNT ON IT

Snug briefs provided the comfort I desired.

"Ramen noodles tonight?"

SIGNS POINT TO YES

And again, it was right; my meal was beefylicious.

Those days were bliss. I did my laundry. I cleaned my kitchen. I did my *(gasp)* dishes. All with the help of my little black friend. No, not Gary Coleman, the other one.

The 8-ball was the head of my household. He told me when to wake up on Monday (2:46) and when to go to work (3:32, not 3:30). At work, he even helped me deal with an especially irritating reporter.

"Should I call him an asshole?"

OUTLOOK NOT SO GOOD

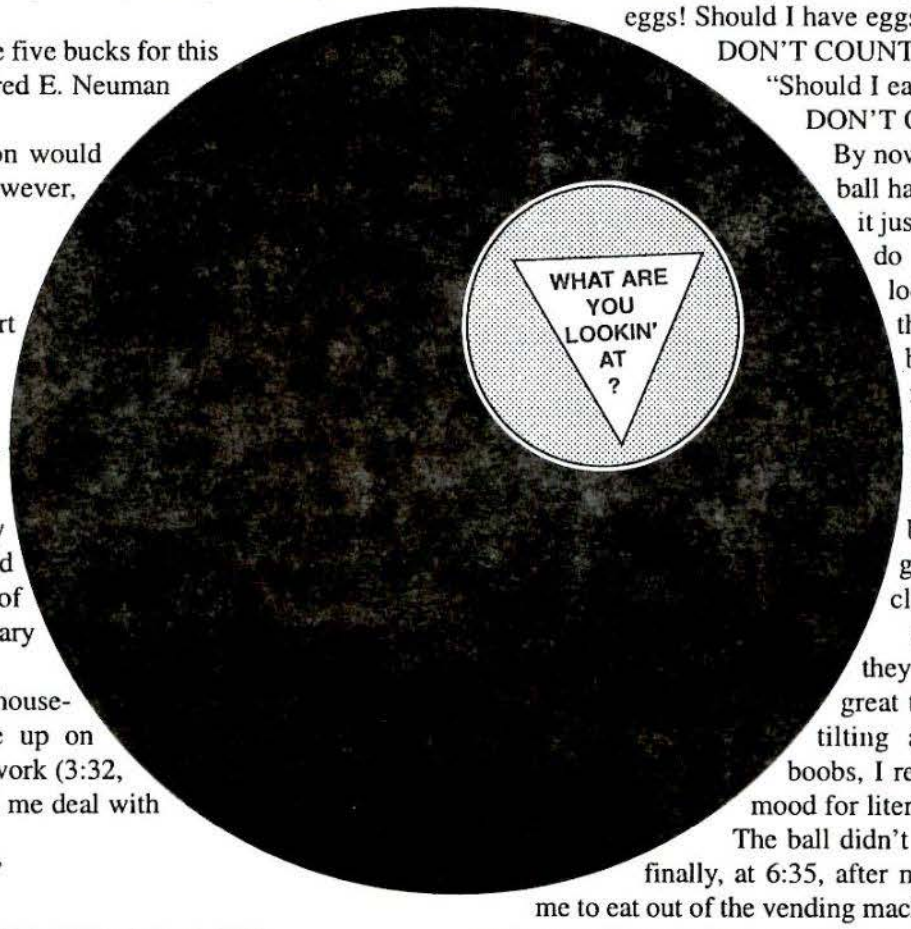
"I should just cut the hell out of his story then, right?"

YOU MAY RELY ON IT

That worked out really well, as did my IT IS CERTAIN meal from the China Palace, although my co-worker Kerri found a rubber band in her broccoli chicken. "Maybe she needs an 8-ball of her own," I reflected smugly.

After the paper was safely in the hands of our pressmen (all of whom attended high school), the "ball" as I called it, told me to head home. So I reclined into my easy chair, went online and XXXXX XXXX XXX XXXXXXXXX.

Sorry. The ball told me not to talk about that stuff.



I finally went to bed at 4:30 a.m. It was a little later than usual, but well within the acceptable timetable. Apparently, my neighbor took up demolitions early the next morning; her banging around woke me up at 8:17 on the dot. I groggily asked the 8-ball if I should go back to sleep.

MY REPLY IS NO

It seemed unlike the 8-ball to suggest such a thing, but given its track record, it obviously knew best. So I roused myself and proceeded to my pristine kitchen.

"Eggs this morning?"

ASK AGAIN LATER

After an hour or so, I asked again.

REPLY HAZY, TRY AGAIN

So I inquired again.

CONCENTRATE AND ASK AGAIN

This was starting to get frustrating. My stomach growled as if part of Satan's soundtrack. I focused on eggs. Eggs eggs eggs. Mmm-mmm, eggs! Should I have eggs for breakfast?

DON'T COUNT ON IT

"Should I eat breakfast at all?"

DON'T COUNT ON IT

By now, I was really hungry, but knew the ball had my best interests at heart. Maybe it just wanted to purify me, like the Hopi do when they go in the medicine lodge. So I didn't eat, and thanks to the ball, weaved my way through my books and CDs to find a complementary duo for midmorning relaxation: Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Britney Spears' *...Baby One More Time*. (Just to make a point: I didn't buy this CD on purpose; I just forgot to fill out the card from the CD club, okay?)1

Like peanut butter and chocolate, they were two great tastes that went great together, but after imagining a guy tilting at whirling teenagers with fake boobs, I realized at about 1 p.m. I was in no mood for literature.

The ball didn't let me eat until dinner time when, finally, at 6:35, after much hemming and hawing, it told me to eat out of the vending machines at work. I had never eaten out of the machines; indeed, newbies at the paper often are warned against eating from the machines with tales of food poisoning and expired soup.

But I was under a higher power. I was under the 8-ball.

The ball quickly moved me from row to row of refrigerated horrors. When it told me to stop and eat, I didn't believe.

"Are you sure?"

OUTLOOK GOOD

1*Editor's Note:* Hey, Ryun. Next time you "accidentally" receive an "unwanted" CD from Columbia House, simply mark it "RETURN TO SENDER," drop it in the mail and rid your life of the disc of negativity.

"Really?"

YES

So I slotted in $1.50 in quarters and retrieved my dinner: the "double chili dogs," two human-consumption-grade wieners splattered in reddish sauce and topped with a cheese-esque protein. They were really bad.

"Do I have to eat them both?"

IT IS CERTAIN

My coworkers laughed at my misfortune and ridiculed me for my beliefs – even the two who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

The ball had really humiliated me. I was tired, embarrassed and had a terrible taste in the back of my throat. It might have been "chili," but I knew it to be the taste of foolishness. Yet I was determined to stick it out. I got home dog-tired and pleaded to the ball to let me sleep.

REPLY HAZY TRY AGAIN

MY SOURCES SAY NO

VERY DOUBTFUL

This was no good. I started feeling like Job, tested to the brink of faith, and I was hoping to emerge stronger and more rooted in my belief than before, but at that point I was just tired.

"You're the devil, sent here to trick me, aren't you?"

WITHOUT A DOUBT

"Don't you know I can walk away at any time, free to eat eggs and nap to my heart's content?"

MY SOURCES SAY NO

"For God's sake! I'm just doing this for a stupid story! I will not let you control my life!"

AS I SEE IT YES

So I threw the ball against the wall and went to bed, even though my neighbor yelled "What the hell?"

Decisiveness isn't my strongest character trait. But I haven't eaten any "double chili dogs" since.

Chalk one up for free will. H

Chupa Chups & HITCH

the journal of pop culture absurdity

join forces to bestow you with a free packet of...

POP ROCKS

Your Pop Rocks are attached above. The free Chupa Chups lollipop, however, is not. Those things are a bitch to glue.

Is your package of Pop Rocks missing? Then tough shit, buster. Go throw a few nickels on the counter of your nearest convenience store and they'll give you one. Or, if you'd like to spend more money, please send $4 for an extra copy of this issue of HITCH.

ROCK

Echo and the Bunnymen
What Are You Going to Do with Your Life?

(London)

The Bunnymen's latest album is quite a marked departure from their earlier work, having much more in common with Ian McCulloch's solo effort *Candleland* than the group's own Goth-rock, post-punk past of "Lips Like Sugar." But it's a welcome one. It's also uncharacteristically optimistic. In today's cynical world, singing Pollyanna lines like "Everything is gonna be alright" and "Nothing's gonna get me down" is dangerous, but luckily, McCulloch has both the pipes and the panache to pull it off. Opening with a *Midnight Cowboy* riff and closing with a baroque lift from Pachelbel's "Canon in D," *What Are You Going to Do with Your Life?* examines those well-trodden issues of love and life, and infuses them with string sections and musical swells that come straight from the Book of Bacharach. Longtime, spiky-haired disciples of the Bunnymen may cringe at this approach, but for me, it was spiritually uplifting, helping me through a week filled with a string of ridiculously stressful crises that otherwise might have found me headed toward breakdownville. Though *Life?* has not a dud among its tracks, "Get in the Car" and "Baby Rain" stand out as two prime examples of perfect pop – optimistic, sunny and soaring. A clear and strong candidate for best-of-year honors this most certainly is.

Luna
The Days of Our Nights

(Jericho)

The ghostly, shimmering melodies of Luna are back in full force with the band's *Pup Tent* follow-up. Not only does *Days* one-up its predecessor, it may even be better than their breakthrough, 1994's *Penthouse*. Musically, few bands gel quite as well, and the sound they've created is indisputably their own. "Dear Diary" packs a mighty choral hook, as do many of the other tracks, from "Superfreaky Memories" (love the spooky guitar solo) to "Words without Wrinkles," which culminates in a whistlefest. It's in this song that typical Luna lyrics reside (*"Go to the window / Make love to the wind"*) – they don't make a helluva lotta sense, but lift the spirit nonetheless. If there's a stumble, it must be the all-German lyrics of "The Slow Song," but that misdeed is redeemed by the closing of

cover of Guns 'N' Roses' "Sweet Child o' Mine." In this slow, thoughtful rendition, Luna uncovers the gorgeous, beautiful song that you always suspected was hiding behind Axl's vodka-drenched growls.

The Flaming Lips
The Soft Bulletin

(Warner Bros.)

Even though they hail from my hometown, I've never really cared much for the music of The Flaming Lips. But *The Soft Bulletin* is different. It also is quite brilliant, and every bit the psycho-pop masterpiece of last year's similar *Deserter's Songs* by Mercury Rev. To achieve this remarkable feat, the Lips haven't abandoned their trademarked sound, only softened its fuzz, and notably adding the kind of orchestral swells that can make your heart skip a beat.

Billy Crawford
Billy Crawford

(V2)

I'll give anything a fair shot, but I'll also call a spade a spade. And this is bubble-gum pop for teens too scared to decide on their own what music they should like. This Hanson-haired, puffy-lipped guy currently has a hit with "Maria Lopez." No matter what the song, it's like Britney Spears with a penis.

The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion
Xtra-Acme USA

(Matador)

Acme was a real breakthrough for JSBX, which they've followed none too soon with *Xtra-Acme USA*, a collection of B-sides and remixes. While it's intended as a fine companion album, it should not be viewed as inferior, for it's every bit as raucous and rockin' as its daddy. The joke is that the Blues Explosion doesn't play the blues, but rather a potent blend of swamp-rock, dirty-funk and, here at least, a dash of breakbeat. Aside from the combustible combo of JSBX, the level of guest talent here is astonishing, with a lineup that includes everyone from Moby and David Holmes to Money Mark and The Lonesome Organist. The party doesn't quite sustain itself through all 19 tracks, but the lampshades are donned mighty quick. It's a sheer blast.

Third Eye Blind
Blue

(Elektra)

Though my friends give me grief for it, I'm not ashamed to admit I loved Third Eye Blind's debut album. I'll go to my grave defending it against those quick to lump it in with the works of Matchbox 20 or Verve Pipe – a comparison most unfair, given the record's real depth. So why don't I feel the same way about the long-time-coming sophomore release, *Blue*? It feels like major slumming. There are glimpses of greatness – the wild "Ode to Maybe" or the '70s sensibilities of "Never Let You Go" are powerful three-minute wonders. But as a whole, *Blue* lacks a catchiness and an edginess, of which the debut was in no short supply. I blame frontman Stephan Jenkins, whose ballooning ego seems to have gotten the best of him. If he had spent less time bedding Hollywood girlfriend Charlize Theron and more time focusing on what he did so well the first time out, I wouldn't be complaining.

Manic Street Preachers
This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours

(Virgin)

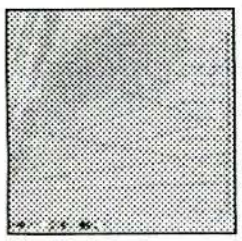
A nominee for UK's prestigious Mercury Prize, the gazillion-selling career watermark from the Manics finally hits these shores. From the opening notes of "The Everlasting," it's clear that this is no ordinary Britpop album. Rather, it's big and epic and has Something to Say. The next song is every bit as majestic as the one before it, alternately inspiring and depressing, though ultimately sunny. In the wake of less-than-stellar efforts from the likes of Oasis, something like this is entirely welcome.

Skunk Anansie
Post Orgasmic Chill

(Virgin)

Still ferocious and aggressive as ever, Skunk Anansie returns with a sound that is a welcome amalgam of breakbeat, strings and sweeping, John Barry-esque arrangements. Listening to "Lately" and "Charley Big Potato," I'm reminded of the late, lamented Living Colour. Though this band doesn't live up to that band's overall greatness, they do fine on their own. If you can listen past the

female singer's often-angry vocals (her name is Skin), there's a lot to like. Perhaps even her voice, once you find the musical goods underneath.



Man or Astro-Man?
EEVIAC

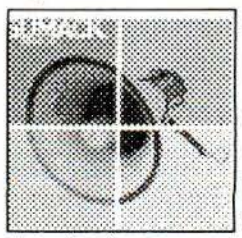
(Touch and Go)

No one does sci-fi surf-punk like the spaced-out quartet of Man or Astro-Man?, and *EEVIAC* is their latest offering of otherworldly instrumentals played at warp speed. This time, there's 13 of them – all similar-sounding and given cryptic titles like "Fractionalized Reception of a Scrambled Transmission" and "Krasnoyask-26" that further discourages you from thinking of the songs in terms of singles. A MOAM album is akin to a roller coaster ride, and you can't very well do that in pieces, either. Perhaps that's why they haven't undertaken covers of late (earlier records included themes from *The Jetsons* and *Mystery Science Theater 3000*). The one drawback of MOAM records is that they don't hold a candle to the energy exhibited by these guys in a live venue. Of course, this only becomes apparent if you've seen them live. And if you haven't, their recorded works are far more aggressive than anything else you're likely to hear on disc anyway.

Noise Kills Punk Dead

(Opulence!)

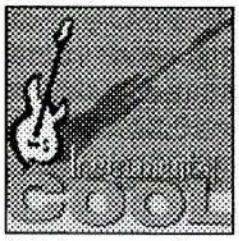
Here's the lowdown: 59 bands, 67 tracks and less than 5% good. At least the title gives you a stern warning, because this is noise – hardcore dissonance through and through, courtesy of "bands" like Ultra Psycho Toast and Ethiopian Hunger Strike. A couple of the tracks venture into John Zorn-like experimental jazz, which while an improvement, still isn't anything worth crowing about.



Sumack
Now Hear This

(V2)

Coming in just weeks before the close of the century, *Now Hear This* may be the greatest surprise of the past year. It won't officially come out until March, so the surprise angle may hold true for 2000, too. Sumack specializes in what they call "junk rock," which right off implies that it sucks, but does anything but. As if Beck fronted Cake, Sumack jumps some genre-hopping among its 13 tracks, touching on funk, punk and everything else – defying descriptions but winning you over with every subsequent song. "Do-Si-Do" is a country cowpunk number, while "Emphysema" is a tounge-in-cheek stab at indie rock. "Metaphysical" merges breakbeat into its alt-rock structure. Just when you think this five-man combo has done it all, they close with the very moving "The Ballad of Frank & Charlie." Every so often, I lose faith in modern music. And then something like this comes along and slaps a smile on my face. *Hear This*, indeed.



Instrumental Cool

(Razor and Tie)

Nothing but two discs full of instrumentals, this collection could conceivably fall into any of our categories – there's some straight-ahead rock, plenty of movie themes, lots of lounge and a smattering of electronic wizardry. It's all over the board, but pleasantly so. Classic instrumentals like "Java" and "Telstar" sit alongside modern-day efforts like Jan Hammer's "Miami Vice Theme" or Meco's take on "Star Wars Theme." Throw in spy music, "Classical Gas" and Deodato's funk version of "Also Sprach Zarathustra," and you can just about complete your collection of the century's wildest instros with this one title.

The Smithereens
God Save the Smithereens

(Velvel/Koch)

I had written off The Smithereens as good as dead, given their absence over the past years. Wrong. Not only are they back, with their first new album in years, but they're just as good as they've ever been. Say what you will about them, but there are few bands that consistently give you what you want. If you expect their trademark best-bar-band sound, you'll be as satisfied as a kid swimming in candy. While there's nothing that's going to jolt you like their earlier singles, "She's Got a Way" is vintage Smithereens. They even attempt a Billie Holiday cover, and come out smellling like blood and roses.

The Beta Band
The Beta Band

(Astralwerks)

Are they serious musicians or convincing pranksters? I don't know, but when the joke is this good, I don't care. Paying off on the promise of *The Three E.P.s*, the Beta Band's first proper album will not disappoint fans of the early, oft-wandering singles. They're still trying to pack as many twists and turns into the span of an eight- or 10-minute song, and the bag of tricks includes deadpan delivery, faux raps, electronic noodling and smart wordplay. They may not know when to end a song, but when most FM-ready artists tire out before the first chorus, I'm willing to cut them a little slack.

Stereophonics
Performance and Cocktails

(V2)

For someone with a name like "Stereophonics," I'd expect a much cleaner, sharper sound than the muddy, raw one on display on the acclaimed *Performance and Cocktails*. Not that that's a complaint, really – the 'Phonics succeed in whipping up something between Britpop and American rock 'n' roll, but without the clichés you often find with both. Nothing stands out as top-notch as "The Bartender and the Thief," but it all comes off delivered with attitude and smarts, if lacking a bit in the melody department.

Demolition Doll Rods
TA

(Matador)

I have a sneaking suspicion Demolition Doll Rods is a band best heard live. How else is one to enjoy two chicks who often perform naked, backed by their transvestite partner? They play Cramps-like garage-fuzzed rock, which, though never my cup of tea, might get me moving in person. I just don't think it translates all that well for a band so dependent on image. And if you doubt that, the CD contains an interactive feature that allows you to dress up the Dolls – a gimmick I found only slightly more engaging than the songs themselves.

Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me
More Music from the Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Maverick)

Ask and ye shall receive. Last issue, we lamented the absence of several key tracks from the *Shagged* album. Lo and behold, the gods at Maverick answered with this follow-up collection that is, in many ways, superior to the first. For one thing, Scary Spice is nowhere to be found. For another, Fantastic Plastic Machine, They Might Be Giants and Propellerheads are. Any of those songs top anything from the previous volume, as does the surprisingly swinging Lords of Acid track or Marvin Gaye's classic "Let's Get It On." This volume makes more use of old songs –

from The Monkees and The Guess Who, among others – but at least they're good old songs. To help move units, a remix of Madonna's "Beautiful Stranger" closes the party.

Mystery Men
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Interscope)

Anchored by the Smash Mouth hit "All Star," the *Mystery Men* soundtrack is a buoyant collection of artists that have their fingers in many plates. The Dub Pistols offer a mix of hip-hop, Latin and ska; Freak Power (a Fatboy Slim collaboration) is as genre-jumping as any of Slim's solo stuff. More conventional offerings can be found in Michael Franti's rhythmic soul ballad "Sometimes" and Spy's alternative wonder "Won't You Come Down," but the album's most welcome turns are those that head toward loopiness, like Mark Mothersbaugh's "The Mystery Men Mantra," Moloko's "Indigo" and "No More Heroes," which marks the long-overdue and most-welcome return of Violent Femmes. On a scale of superness, this one charts quite high.

The Acid House
Music from the Motion Picture

(Capitol)

Viewed as a cinematic cousin to *Trainspotting*, *The Acid House* has a similarly exhilarating soundtrack. Though no runaway classic, it is pleasingly cohesive. With a lean toward electronica, the collection boasts top-notch performances from The Chemical Brothers, Death in Vegas and the lounge-*frommage* of Dimitri from Paris. For Britpop purists, tracks from Oasis and The Verve will fit the bill. Barry Adamson and Nick Cave team for a lovely *noir* excursion, while Belle & Sebastian's "Slow Graffiti" takes the cake with a low-key, intoxicating approach. Also doing well are Beth Orton, Primal Scream and Bentley Rhythm Ace.

Best Laid Plans
Music from the Motion Picture

(Virgin)

Although the film barely saw release, everyone should familiarize themselves with Craig Armstrong. Relatively new to the composing game, here's hoping he sticks around for a long, long time. Merging traditional composition with futuristic, trip-hop touches, his score is wonderfully moody and evocative, perking up only a bit for the hopeful "Father and Son." Matching his laid-back backdrop are songs from Mazzy Star and Gomez, blending in perfectly. Neneh Cherry provides a surprising highlight with the moving "Twisted Mess." Patsy Cline's unwitting contribution, "Why Can't He Be You," is good, but feels a bit out of place amidst an otherwise cohesive and satisfying soundtrack.

Splendor
Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Astralwerks)

Though Gregg Araki films rub me like sandpaper, his latest, *Splendor*, boasts a lively and infectiously fun soundtrack. Comprised largely of rare cuts, the album features a number of alternative and Brit-pop classics from London Suede, Blur and Everything but the Girl remixed by the formidable talents of Lionrock, Moby and UNKLE's James Lavelle. Of all the remixes, two stand out: Atlas' take on House of Love's "I Don't Know Why I Love You" and the unbelievably funky version of Air's "Kelly Watch the Stars," amp'd up like mad by The Moog Cookbook. Fatboy Slim and The Chemical Brothers also find their way amidst the mix, as does New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle," of which one can never hear enough.

Stigmata
Music from the MGM Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Virgin)

The big news is that Smashing Pumpkin ringleader Billy Corgan has written his first score, but – if like me – you couldn't care less about the Pumpkins, it's no big deal. That's not to say his work here sucks; it doesn't, and at the very least, we don't have to hear his whiny voice. Thankfully, there's a great batch of songs that start the album, from an eerie Chumbawamba remix to a typically icy track from Björk. The vibe created by the contributions of Massive Attack, David Bowie and especially the Afro Celt Sound System/Sinéad O'Connor team-up is quite heavenly.

The Best of Bond ... James Bond

(Capitol)

By now, James Bond film themes are a genre all their own, and to commemorate the release of *The World Is Not Enough*, Capitol has once again rounded up the series' greatest hits. Most of the material was on the *30th Anniversary* album from a few years back, with the exception of the *GoldenEye* and *Tomorrow Never Dies* themes. We all have our favorites (in my case, "Nobody Does It Better" and "Goldfinger"), and no matter what yours may be, rest assured they're here, from a-ha to Wings. In hindsight, Duran Duran's "A View to a Kill" is a pretty damn good song, but having a well-past-her-prime Gladys Knight handle chores for "License to Kill" is a misstep on the order of George Lazenby. The extensive liner notes will thrill Bond fans further.

This Is Cult Fiction

(Virgin)

The American version of "the international best-seller," *This Is Cult Fiction* offers "17 cult TV & film classics." To wit, themes from *Batman*, *Miami Vice* and *Mission: Impossible*, though not necessarily from the original artists. If you don't already have the British version (whose track listing is tighter), you'll enjoy this, though two of the three UK sequel collections are far better.

Cartoon Medley

(Kid Rhino)

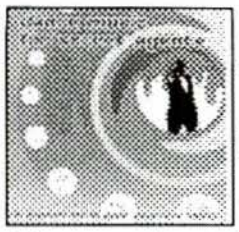
At a mighty quick clip, *Cartoon Medley* gives you 38 themes from Cartoon Network shows, from classics like *Speed Racer* and *Underdog* to modern-day efforts *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Cow and Chicken*. As you might expect, the new themes don't hold a candle to the old ones. Of all the more recent cartoon themes, the only one that makes much of a dent is the weirdo-jazz of *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast*. Rhino's *Toon Tunes* collection from '97 was more comprehensive and better.

Science Fiction
Music from the Movies & T.V.: Volume 1

Science Fiction
Music from the Movies & T.V.: Volume 2

(St. Clair)

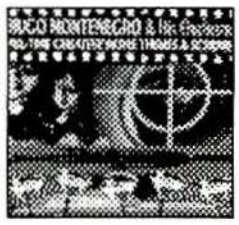
A few issues ago, we reviewed a little budget number called *Music from Science Fiction Movies & T.V.* These two discs hold all that material, as well as new tracks recorded to take advantage of *The Phantom Menace*'s stranglehold on the States. All the themes – *Star Trek*, *The X-Files* and *2001*, among others – are given the down-and-dirty, notch-above-Meco, guy-in-the-studio-with-a-synthesizer treatment, not that I'm complaining. (I'll take cheddar over goat cheese any day.) But what's with referring to *Empire* and *Jedi* as *Star Wars II* and *III*?



Dance Music for Secret Agents
The Greatest Secret Agent Electronica Themes

(Hypnotic)

Ignore, for a moment, that *Dark Shadows* had no secret agents, and you'll enjoy this 11-track take on spy music's most beloved themes. Virtual unknowns like Audio Science and Millennium bring the songs of James Bond and Pink Panther into the next century via much electronic noodling. All in all, it's pretty much consistent and on the level, with the songs from *Twin Peaks*, *The Saint*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Miami Vice* earning high marks. Like the label's earlier *Bond, Beat & Bass* from two years back, not a bad idea executed not bad at all.



Hugo Montenegro & His Orchestra
All-Time Greatest Movie Themes & Schemes

(RCA)

Poor packaging mars one's enjoyment of a fairly good package, consisting of 20 covers of film and television themes, with hearty helpings of James Bond and Morricone's spaghetti Western tunes. Between those offerings are cuts from *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The FBI* and, for some reason, *Wait Until Dark*. Though Montenegro wrote zilch of these songs, he had a knack for bringing in a touch of bizarre instrumentation in a not-entirely-successful attempt to carve his own sound. The *Goldfinger* theme is the best example of this. For a more fun Montenegro, check out the recently reissued *Moog Power* album instead.

SWANK

Burt Bacharach
The Best of Burt Bacharach: 20th Century Masters – The Millennium Collection

(A&M)

That's one long title for someone who makes such simple, wonderful music. There's no denying Burt's place as one of this century's greatest composers, and here's yet another reissue of pure proof. Twelve Bacharach classics are here, all performed by Burt himself, which means vocals are rare. I've always preferred these largely instrumental takes of songs like "This Guy's in Love" and "Don't Make Me Over" to the covers by other artists that went on to become huge hits. That a song can move one so much without lyrics is a testament to the man's genius.

Sunshine Pop 99

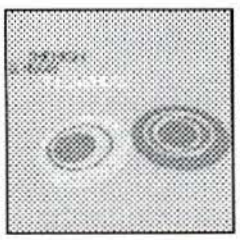
(ÊL/Cherry Red)

Fans of *Songs for the Jet Set*, take note: A full 21 of *Jet Set* mastermind Mike Alway's easy-pop classics have been collected on this similarly enigmatic disc, comprised mostly of songs that you'd be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. Aside from four *Jet Set* numbers, Marden Hill impresses most with the breezy "Cadaquez." Two cuts offer early glimpses of the work of Everything but the Girl (pre-"Missing"), while Felt's "Something Sends Me to Sleep" is like an early-'90s trip back to when alternative radio didn't suck. With contributions from Momus, Louis Phillipe and The Monochrome Set, there's a lot to love here.

Ursula 1000
The Now Sound of Ursula 1000

(ESL Music)

Sample-heavy and dance-friendly, the high-fashion outfit of Ursula 1000 puts peers like Arling & Cameron to shame. Anything hip enough to sample *The Party* has nothing but good intentions, and Ursula 1000 delivers track after track. It's hard to imagine "Funky Bikini" and "Mambo 1000" *not* sweeping the nation, but then the harsh, constricting reality of Top 40 radio sets in. I don't know that I've ever heard electronic lounge done this startlingly well. With this and the recent Thievery Corporation releases, ESL is fast becoming one of the most reliable labels around.



The High Llamas
Snowbug

(V2)

Sean O'Hagan and his High Llamas return for another foray into dreamy, lush electronic pop. Like *Hawaii* or *Cold & Bouncy* before it, *Snowbug* is a delightfully smooth and soothing ride along any idyllic, windmill-strewn coastline. If the Llamas are beginning to sound a bit like Stereolab (and vice versa), it's no accident; O'Hagan has his hands all over that band's last albums, and 'Lab vocalists Laetitia Sadler and Mary Ramsey show up to deliver the goods on a couple of numbers. With the Llamas' continued use of banjos and vibes, the songs of *Snowbug* seem instantly familiar and comfortable, creating a toasty-warm feeling – which is what any great winter record should do.

Enoch Light
Spaced Out

(SPJ)

A stupendously schizophrenic concept album from one of lounge's forefathers, *Spaced Out* may be the smartest six-buck, bargain-bin buy of the century. Traversing the musically disparate (but highly alliterative) worlds of Bach, the Beatles and Burt Bacharach, the brief work is an wonderfully enjoyable anachronism, back when acts dared to do quick, high-concept projects like this in speedy numbers. The "stereo" effects are rather primitive, but the music proves unbeatable, utilizing electric harpsichords, flugelhorns and the Moog organ.

Chaino
Africana and Beyond!

(Dionysus/Bacchus)

Before "jungle" was a term co-opted by the rave world, jungle was just jungle – namely, lotsa African drums and percussion, with the occasional animal call. This reissue visits the lost work of the virtually unknown (and recently deceased) artist Chaino, and is divided among his exotic, rock and African output.

Erotic Dreams
In the Mood for Love

(Madacy)

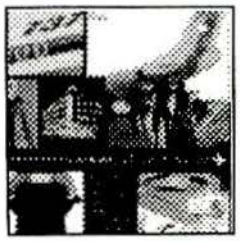
Erotic Dreams is one of those bargain-bin titles with no artists credited, presumably for the same reasons porn stars use *nom de plumes*. A collection of studio-smooth turn-on music, the disc boasts the immortal "Bolero," the Serge Gainsbourg hit "Je T'Aime, Moi Non Plus," the synth classic "Bilitis," themes to both *Emmanuelle* and *Black Emmanuelle*, and more awkward groans than a high school prom night. As cheesy as a yeast infection, for sure, but its charm is highly communicable. You will need a good shower after listening to this, or at the very least, a wad of Kleenex.

Kinky Beats

(Lacerba)

Somewhere between '60s swingin' London and the soulful *Shaft* '70s is a sound celebrated in 22 uptempo, "Hammond-fueled floorfillers," featuring a mix of old and new artists. Some of the current acts hail from Japan and Italy, once again proving their hipness over Americans in embracing this style of wild, acid-jazzy music. Jean Jacques Perrey's omnipresent "E.V.A." helps kick off the collection, and if you're familiar with that, you

know what kind of tongue-in-cheek tunes you're in for – a promise realized with the inclusion of a sitar-heavy cover of The Who's "I Can See for Miles" and Marcello Minerbi's interpretation of "Watermelon Man." Michael Viner's Incredible Bongo Band, however, takes the cake with "Apache." Of the newer stuff, I was blown away by "Jackie in Action," an epic number from the outfit Soul Mission. Overlong at nearly two dozen tracks, this import still has lots of lost treasures to offer the *Austin Powers* crowd.



Eighteenth Street Lounge Soundtracks
Jet Society
(ESL Music)

ESL Music Presents Easy Tempo
(ESL Music)

About the only good you'll find these days in Washington D.C. is the music coming out of the Eighteenth Street Lounge. There, a variety of smoky-cool, loungecore-type tunes fill the air, and the club's label – founded by half of Thievery Corporation – showcases some of the acts on its own soundtracks. *Jet Society* marks the second and most recent. Whereas the first volume sported an impressive lineup of electronic sounds, *Jet Society* stays true to its title, emanating a true lounge feel. With 12 acts spanning the globe, the disc offers a fine mix of future jazz, buoyant soul and easypop. Mo Horizons' "Foto Viva" is a smooth Italian chillout tune, while "Luneara" from Trio Electrico is a fast-paced acid jazz number. Other artists – who cares if you haven't heard of them? I hadn't either – include Stereo Action Unlimited and Bobby Hughes Experience. But it's the Cordara Orchestra's closer from which this collection takes its name that stands the tallest. It's the most beautiful Bacharach song that Bacharach never wrote: a horn-drenched cause for celebration that simply soars. If you're wondering who might have influenced some of these artists, look no further than *ESL Presents Easy Tempo*, a compilation of tracks from the multi-volume *Easy Tempo* import series of Italian '60s and '70s film music. Personally selected by Thievery Corporation – and the first in a promised string of releases – it contains wonderfully sleazy cut after wonderfully sleazy cut, representing the best music pornos ever had the pleasure by which to be scored (pun not intended). I've got to give the Thievery Corporation points for not only offering this so I don't have to buy all those expensive imports, but also for presenting these tunes as they were, ignoring any silly notion to mix them.

Simultaneous Ice Cream
(Siesta)

A sequel to last year's exercise in kiddie psychedelia, *Algebra Spaghetti*, the wonderful *Simultaneous Ice Cream* is a slightly more mature effort, capturing those crush-heavy early-teen years when angst started to settle in. As with Mike Alway's other projects, the bands on *SIC* – Lollipop Train and Sunshine Day among them – don't really exist in any world except that which is formed explicitly for the 45 or so minutes that this record allows. It opens with the organ-fueled pop wonder "Mrs. Bluebird" and follows not long after with Mild Euphoria's instrumental "World of Make-Believe," both of which touch my heart. As with *Alegbra*, there are several covers, the most memorable being the Carole King-penned "Porpoise Song." Alternately playful and introspective, *SIC* is a special tribute to those years when you had more problems than you liked, and many could be solved – albeit temporarily – with the spin of a beloved 45.

WEIRD

Air
Premiers Symptomes
(Astralwerks)

Before *Moon Safari*, the French duo Air issued a handful of singles. The five rare songs were collected on an overseas import last year, but now Astralwerks has brought it stateside, and slapped on two extra tracks. These "new" lost tracks exhibit a funkiness not seen on *Safari*. But the first five cuts are really the meat – all instrumentals that clearly show a great act in development. They're not so much songs as they are sketches – sparse but highly melodic, otherworldly escapades that verge on experimental. The instrumentation that made *Safari* so interesting – a mix of cheesy organs and heart-tugging horns – is intact. Thus, so is the charm. Nothing is as deliciously perfect as that record, but once you get into it, you're hooked 'til the end, trapped in a semi-surreal dream you don't want to end.

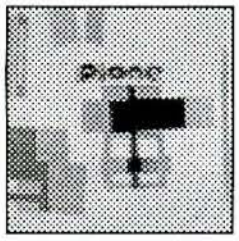
Stereolab
Cobra and Phases Group Play Voltage in the Milky Night
(Elektra)

It's almost as if Stereolab *dares* you to like them. Their album and song titles don't mean squat. Their liner notes are just a notch above readable. Their cover art often resembles Rorschach tests. Often times, the tunes are sung in French. All giving the impression that they're as accessible as a novel written in binary code. So why do they continue to be one of my favorite bands? For one, they're fantastic. Since their breakthrough *Emperor Tomato Ketchup* album several years ago, Stereolab has delivered a consistent output of music that does its best to defy explanation while breaking boundaries. Their distinct sound – achieved by utilizing instruments such as exotic organs, marimbas, vibes and even a musical saw – takes an E-Z approach to electronic music, resulting in something you might hear in your dentist's chair late in the 21st century. With the terribly titled *Cobra and Phases Group*, you're getting more of the same ol' Stereolab – namely, the bubbling notes and pulsating, space-borne sound effects that somehow mix into a euphoric elixir. No one cut emerges ahead of the other, as their work is best taken as a whole. The rambling "Blue Milk," however, is in desperate need of editing, taking the band's propensity for Steve Reich-like repetition several minutes past its welcome. Some may be put off that *Cobra and Phases Group* sounds a lot like their last album, *Dots and Loops*, which sounded a lot like *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*. But when your sound is this sweet, why risk screwing it up? Besides, with Stereolab so far ahead of its time, they're probably just waiting for the rest of the world to catch up.

Death in Vegas
The Contino Sessions
(Time Bomb/Concrete)

Don't let the sleazy name scare you. Like The Chemical Brothers or UNKLE, Death in Vegas is quietly crafting some of the most unconventional and innovative music you're likely to hear, bridging the gap between rock 'n' roll and electronica as we make that jump into the next millennium. Casual listeners may know DIV for its warped and throbbing contribution to the *Lost in Space* soundtrack, "Song for Penny." That cut can be found here, albeit under the new, more appropriate title of "Death Threat" and sans robot voices. Similar to that is the opening "Dirge," a slow but solid track that begins with a whisper, gradually building layer upon layer to reach a drum-powered sonic assault. "Flying" is a real mood-lifter, as is the brief instrumental "Fever Street." Following that is the album's highlight, the exotic "Aladdin's Story," which concocts and repeats a wonderful, Eastern-influenced melody for about three minutes before allowing Dot Allison to croon her line of seductive, smoky vocals: *"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen / Nobody knows the sorrow."* Allison, wife of DIV mastermind Richard Fearless, is one of several guest stars adorning *The Contino Sessions*. Bobby Gillespie of

Primal Scream lends vocals to "Soul Auctioneer," while Iggy Pop turns up to great effect as the serial-killer narrator of the groovy "Aisha." The rule is that guest stars come off as a cheap, brainless gimmick, but *The Contino Sessions* is an exception. With this, their sophomore effort, Death in Vegas easily has outdone its impressive (but no milestone) dub debut, *Dead Elvis*, and earmarked itself as an act to watch. Dark but not depressing, *The Contino Sessions* is best experienced on rainy, dreary days.



Plone
For Beginner Piano

(Matador)

More than a few critics have dubbed Plone's debut as "Air meets the Teletubbies." While I don't entirely agree with that description, I can't come up with anything better. Regardless, the 10 songs here will delight the hell out of you, alternating reminding you of every mildly upsetting cartoon you ever saw and every Theremin-drenched sci-fi B-movie score you ever heard. If vocals are present at all, they've been put through a vocoder, adding robotic narration to the Tinkertoy procession. In taking a simplified, idyllic approach to electronica, Plone has done what few others have – creating a warm, human sound from cold, inhuman instruments. In that aspect, they're like a Stereolab Jr. Hey, that's it! Stereolab Jr.!

Atari Teenage Riot
60 Second Wipe Out

(Digital Hardcore/ Elektra)

"ACTION!!!" cries Alec Empire at the start of Atari Teenage Riot's latest album, and with that, the noise kicks in. Unfortunately, it never stops, either. With one cut (I hate to use the term "song" here) seemingly no different than the next, ATR's latest is yet another hard-edged, take-no-prisoners assault on the senses. Some see these shenanigans as acts of rebellion; I see it as a mask for no talent. "Anarchy 99" and "By Any Means Necessary" are but a few of the titles – didn't this anti-authority act play out a few years ago?

Solex
Pick Up

(Matador)

Solex is a Dutch record-store owner who makes songs out of samples from bad, unsold CDs. For this, her sophomore effort, she made songs out of samples from a range of live concerts – rock, jazz, classical and even metal. The experiment doesn't always result in a three-minute gem, but at least it's always interesting. As if you couldn't tell from her terrific song titles ("That'll Be $22.95," "Dork at 12 O'Clock," "Another Tune Like 'Not Fade Away'"), Solex is not one to take herself or her music seriously. The girl's out to have fun, and more often than not, her exuberance rubs off. Some of the songs are wonderfully precious, like "That's What You Get with People Like That on Cruises Like These." If you're listening to her high-pitched vocals, you're missing the point; it's the music – deconstructed, cut and pasted – that's her message.

Alex Gopher
You, My Baby & I

(V2)

The French music revolution continues unabated with this fine release from house fave Alex Gopher. From the opening disco-funk of "Time," it's clear the man is here to party, an agenda carried throughout, notably on "Party People," which *should* be a huge novelty hit, if FM radio had any balls these days. But it's on more chilled notes where Gopher hits his heights. "God Bless the Child" dramatically weaves the sampled voice of the late Billie Holiday into a somber, down-tempo number. Better yet, he collaborates with Air's J.B. Dunckel on "Ralph & Kathy," a robotic space opera with the coolest riff you're likely to hear in a long while. Though Gopher does just fine by himself, the work with Dunckel and Holiday is so strong that more guests may have made this album even cooler, if such a thing is even possible.

Pole
CD1

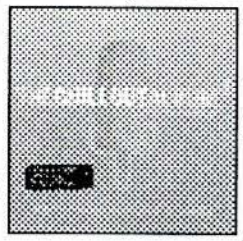
(Matador)

Hailing from Germany, Pole is a one-man outfit who crafts slow, near-rhythmless electronic music utilizing interference from a defective filter. The resulting crackles chirp like crickets throughout, and there's a warm hum reminiscent of a needle snaking its way through the groove of a vinyl record. *CD1* is a quiet album that demands your attention; if you put it on as background music, you'll reach the end and feel like you didn't hear a thing. Either it will drive you crazy or placate your soul. Me? I'm placated. It's a rich sound that demands many a listen.

Urbal Beats 3

(UTV)

Urb Magazine's third "definitive guide to electronic music" is more accessible than *Urbal Beats 2*, but still lacking the uniform greatness of the original. The main problem is that the first half is heavily weighted with hip-hop and rap from the likes of Method Man, Uberzone and Mos Def – I've got news for you: *It ain't electronic!* Luckily, *UB3* redeems itself later with a string of cool cuts from lesser-known acts, including the cut-and-paste "Cut Chemist Suite" from Ozomatli, the sounds-just-like-it-sounds "That Zipper Track" from DJ Dan and the irresistible big beat extravaganza of Hardknox's "Fire Like This." Elder statesmen like Moby, Orbital, Underworld, The Crystal Method and UNKLE all acquit themselves just nicely, thanks. My suggestion for *UB4*? Electronic, electronic, electronic.

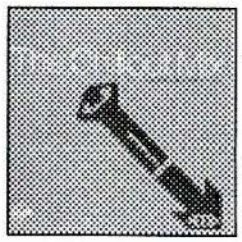


The Chillout Album 2

(Telstar TV)

The Chillout Mix

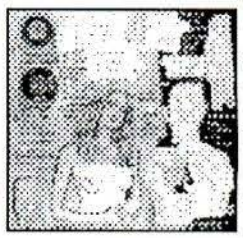
(Virgin)



Bar Culture
The Essential Pre-Club Mix

(Virgin)

A quick, double-disc sequel, *The Chillout Album 2* is well worth importing. Though inferior to its superb predecessor, there are lots of pleasures to be found here, from early works of Saint Etienne and Stereo MC's to recent grooves of Morcheeba and David Holmes. Worth the repeat button are cuts from Fatboy Slim, The Wiseguys, Underworld and Primal Scream. The second disc ends with a four-song blast from the past, effortlessly blending Marvin Gaye, Quincy Jones, Shirley Bassey and the *Blade Runner* love theme into one tempting pre-dawn elixir. Not about to be outdone, Virgin weighs in with its own two-disc entry, the superior *Chillout Mix*, with 35 blissful cuts, most of which aren't to be found on other "chillout" comps – a fact most admirable. Rather, *Mix* (not a mix at all) seeks out strong singles that *haven't* been played to death, including Gomez's "Tijuana Lady," Bran Van 3000's nocturnal "Drinking in L.A." and Dubstar's shining "Stars." Last, there's *Bar Culture*, another two discs of cool tunes designed for the pre-club windup and post-club wind-down, featuring all the usual suspects (Air, Roni Size, Fatboy Slim, EZ Rollers, etc.). With any of them, you can't go wrong.

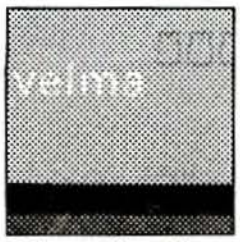


Suck It and See

(Rykodisc)

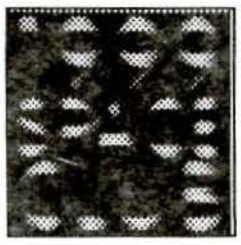
Despite its crude title and packaging, a majority of this two-disc tribute to XXX movies could pass for PG-13. Coordinated by Howie B., the 18 cuts of "aural pornogra-

phy" range from swinging lounge to manic disco. And not surprisingly, it's the artists whose works are more suggestive than explicit that impress most, including Love TKO with "Love Thong" and Fantastic Plastic Machine's "Green Door." Clearly, two discs of the stuff is overkill, and aside from Deadly Avenger and Chari Chari Chari, the second CD could be excised entirely without losing much.



Velma
Cyclique
(Emperor Norton)

Velma is a three-man outfit serving up slow, sparse tunes that aren't that tuneful, usually with one line of vocals repeated over and over, for anywhere from five to 10 minutes. Upon first listen, it's off-putting. Upon second listen, it's kind of hypnotic. "Ping Pong" and "Tricycle" are nice cuts with which to test the water. It may try your patience, but devoting some time will yield a little reward. At the very least, it's unlike anything else you've heard this year.



Arling & Cameron
Space Club 1999
(Emperor Norton)

A four-song EP, *Space Club 1999* already bests *anything* from A&C's recent *All-In* album, which is encouraging news for those awaiting the forthcoming *Music for Imaginary Films*. "1999 Spaceclub" is just that, a nifty little number seeking to bridge the sounds of cheesy sci-fi and modern-day electronics. An extended version and remix also appear, as does "Spacebeach," a similar but sunnier tune that's not afraid to just have fun. As for whatever else the duo has in store for us with *Films*, I can't wait.

Kid Loco
DJ-Kicks
(Studio K7)

Kid Loco's mix CD is a slightly chilled exploration of trip-hop, ranging from the sparse electronica of Boards of Canada to the celebrated techno of Underworld. The Kid goes cinematic with the inclusion of DJ Vadim's noir-ish "Theme from Conquest of the Irrational" and yanks on some heart strings with the sublime "Introspection," from jazz futurists Jazzanova. The mix loses some momentum in the last three or four featured songs, which verge toward the realm of uneasy listening – a marked departure from the hour or so that precedes it. Not surprisingly, the weakest songs here are the two that bookend the mix, both Loco originals. In the liner notes, Loco advocates smoking pot prior to listening to the album, but any monkey who needs drugs to heighten the sensation of music this spaced is clearly missing the point.

Unknown-werks
Volume 01
(Astralwerks)

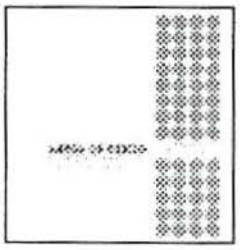
Showcasing the "new crop of American electronic artists," *Unknownwerks* is full of acts from coast to coast and in between whose works you don't know. At least not yet. Kudos to Astralwerks for giving these dozen new talents the wide and deserving exposure they otherwise would not have had. All prove themselves worthy of bigger and better things, but the best is Metrodub, which hails from Miami and turns up here with the jazz-fueled "Cut Up Music." The styles range from downtempo to breakbeat to blaxploitation funk, so you get a nice sampling across the board.

The Cinematic Orchestra
Motion
(Ninja Tune)

This record sounds like the way you feel after three gin-and-tonics: all warm and woozy. Not a true "orchestra," but rather the brainchild of *wunderkind* J. Swinscoe, The Cinematic Orchestra weaves seven sublime, free-flowing instrumentals that challenge one's notions of jazz while enhancing one's appreciation for it. Don't let the word "jazz" scare you, because Swinscoe's music isn't – the word is more apt to describe the smoky, hazy vibe his loose, repetitious melodies stir up. One glance at the song titles instantly reveal his sources for inspiration – "Diabolus," "Night of the Iguana" and "Channel 1 Suite" – that of the moving image. All of *Motion*'s cuts sound deliberately written for the big screen, though it's certain whatever film it would accompany would scare the pants off Hollywood. That's a compliment. Though sometimes straying for a few minutes too long and occasionally breaking into some Medeski Martin & Wood-style funk, the works that comprise *Motion* form a nice, cohesive soundtrack to any given night of slight inebriation in places so exotic that they don't exist anywhere but on celluloid.

The Wiseguys
The Antidote
(Ideal)

An *Antidote* for what? The blues, boredom and all its brothers, I guess, because The Wiseguys' debut LP is one of the hip-hop-happiest pick-me-ups of 1999. By now you've no doubt heard the hit single "Ooh La La" backing some beer commercial on the tube. I'm pleased to report the same sampled funkiness and unbridled infectiousness has spread to most of the other album cuts as well, particularly "Cowboy '78." You can't help but be moved (physically, that is). If there's a complaint, it's that the record is saddled with pointless rap vocals on a couple of cuts – a disheartening trend seen on a growing number of recent releases as well. Overall, though, fans of Fatboy Slim will find another big-beat friend in this one.



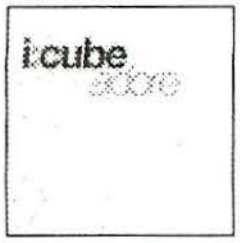
Best of Moog
(Loud/Repeat)

The Moog synthesizer has been treated like a bastard stepchild in the world of popular music, but its influence has been immeasurable. Whether you realize it or not, the Moog's strangely affecting robotic weirdness has been a part of your life, and this collection of "electronic pop hits from the '60s and '70s" is proof. Back then, the Moog was front-and-center in Hot Butter's hit "Popcorn," written by the famed electro-experimental duo of Perrey and Kingsley. Today, it's got the kids a-jumpin' and a-bumpin' all over those MasterCard spots, via a Fatboy Slim remix of Perrey's classic "E.V.A." (Both the original and the remix bookend this disc.) The P&K team is responsible for a good third of the material here, including "The Savers," which later was incorporated as the theme for the game show *The Joker's Wild*. They also cover two lounge classics, the bossa-nova staple "One Note Samba" and Herb Alpert's "Spanish Flea," the tune you hear on *The Dating Game*. For some reason, Moog men covered a lot of film themes, as Enoch Light did with much aplomb with Burt Bacharach's "Bond St." from the freewheeling *Casino Royale*. Somehow, John Barry's *Midnight Cowboy* score is rendered even more disturbing than ever through Martin Denny's handiwork, yet you'll still tap your toes. With this disc, they've pulled off a valuable historical document that's a hell of a lot of fun to digest. And ccording to the liner notes, all they were aiming for was to make "C-3PO's idea of a good fuck record." Who knew?

At Home with the Groovebox
(Grand Royal)

What a concept: Give a sample-packed Roland Groovebox to a slew of artists old and new, restrict them from outside sources and compile the turned-in tracks. The end result is a disc so hip that it hurts. Even stripped of their precious Korgs and mini-Moogs, Air is capable of producing another beautiful and otherworldly tune, matched by Stereolab cohort John McEntire with "J.I.H.A.D." Beck offers the instrumental "Boyz," while now-defunct Pavement tells the tale of "Robyn Turns 26." Leave it to Sonic Youth for doing a non-song, while Dick Hyman's "Glass Slipper" is as meandering as his "Minotaur" was decades ago. Turning in

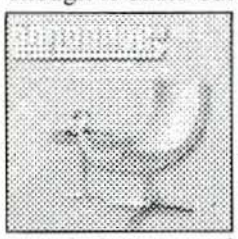
cool performances are Money Mark, Sean Lennon and Cibo Matto, but even they are usurped by their elder statesmen of Jean Jacques Perrey, who goes absolutely and wonderfully nuts with "Groovy Leprechauns," and his former partner Gershon Kingsley, who revisits their hit "Popcorn," and emerges surprisingly with the most contemporary sounding cut of all. This is 2000's first must-have.



I:Cube
Adore

(Big Red)

Lately, French music has been all the rage with the success of Air, Basement Jaxx and Daft Punk. Now flying in under the radar is Paris' I:Cube, whose *Adore* suggests warm house music invaded by the cold machinations of an Aphex Twin. Whereas fellow house artists unleash the funk, I:Cube takes it down a bit to a mid-tempo chill-out. With the title track and the likes of "The Basic Bastard," it's evident that I:Cube is inventive enough to stand out among a crowded field.



Om Lounge 3

(Om)

Future-jazz never sounded so cool than this third entry in the series – an intoxicating mix of sounds from 'round the globe. Representing a variety of styles are Andy Caldwell's ode to Martin Denny exotica and Soulstice's torch-song tribute. Fila Brazilla, Chaser and East West Connection all contribute stellar tracks to an ace compilation with no misses among its 14 spaced-out, electro-cool tracks.

MUSIC

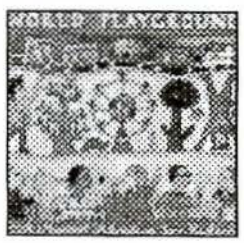
Bruce Haack, Esther Nelson & Dimension 5 Records
Listen Compute Rock Home

(Emperor Norton)

In the '60s and '70s, instrument-inventor Haack and school teacher Nelson made a string of bizarre records for kids which have become prized among collectors. This rounds up the best from the hard-to-find albums, which clearly were ahead of their time. And you know what? They still are! Subjects of the songs range from motorcycles and robots to popcorn and ants. The accompanying music is just as varied – rock, folk, soul and genres that seem indescribable. Unfortunately, the music is rather muted and takes a backseat to the vocals, which, truth be told, are really just narration. I found it charming for a little while, then annoying, then both, back and forth.

FF

In no particular order: Rap fans may want to pick up **The Arsonists**' *As the World Burns* (Matador) and *2000 Fold* (Ideal) from **Styles of Beyond**, but not being rap fans, it's not our cup of tea. After a long hiatus, **Leftfield** returns with *Rhythm and Stealth* (Columbia), a sonically polished and full-bodied electronica album. The cut "El Cid" is every bit an Art of Noise tribute – not a bad sound to ape. On the world music front, Putumayo has issued the ***World Playground*** compilation for kids, featuring Buckwheat Zydeco and at least one Marley. Their ***New World Party*** comp is even better, offering soul, hip-hop and funk from all reaches of the globe. **Reveille** is a band cut from the Korn mold, *Laced* (Elektra) is its hard-edged debut, and it's no coincidence that minus a few letters, "Reveille" becomes "vile." **Feeder**'s sophomore outing *Yesterday Went Too Soon* (Elektra) is power pop with a dark edge, and it's not half bad. **Iggy Pop** is back with *Avenue B* (Virgin), and I'm pleased to say Iggy is still being Iggy. As one of the titles goes, "No Shit." Looking for new music to accompany your next drug party? Look no further than **Bardo Pond**'s *Set and Setting* (Matador), a slow, woozy, drawn-out record that accurately captures the part when the paranoia kicks in. **P.J. Olsson** has *Words for Living* (Columbia), and those words may be, "I'm a kinder, gentler Beck." Not that there's anything wrong with that, as Olsson's debut is, more often than not, charming and winning. Over at Astralwerks, **Mu-Ziq** returns with a lesson on *Royal Astronomy*, and it's a damn good one, portraying a range of emotions in fine electronic form. Like Astralwerks, V2 has built an impressive roster of electronic artists, including Moby, Underworld and Alex Gopher, all of whom are showcased on the budget-priced ***What the Funk You Waitin' For?***, but via bass-thumpin' remixes by unknowns with one-tenth the talent. "Crack Soundtrack," "Cocaine Whore" and "(Sure Do Feel Like a) Piece of Shit" can all be found on **The Unband**'s *Retarder* (TVT), not that you've ever want to. ***Earthdance*** (Common Ground) is a benefit album featuring the likes of Underworld, Fatboy Slim, Moby and Orbital – good and good for you. 1500 Records has reissued **David Holmes'** solid '95 debut, *This Film's Crap Let's Slash the Seats*, and given us a bonus disc of remixes from Sarah Cracknell and Kruder + Dorfmeister. Take a *Leap of Faith* (4AD) from UK's **Air Cuba** – it's an awesome hour of futurerock and electrofun. **Takako Minekawa** has *Fun9* (Emperor Norton), your standard quirky J-pop stuff, complete with little-girl vocals. *Programmed* (Astralwerks) is **The Innerzone Orchestra**'s ambitious future-jazz opus that pays off in dark, urban rhythms and drum 'n' bass. Finally, Rumour's ***Slowburn: Blissed-Out Beats and After Hours Anthems*** is just that, with wonderfully downtempo contributions from Art of Noise, St. Etienne and Aphex Twin.



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COOL AND STRANGE MUSIC! Magazine

Dedicated to Unusual Sounds!
1101 Colby Ave.
Everett, WA USA 98201

Eyes Wide Shut
(1999)
Warner Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Eyes Wide Shut, boobs right out. Stanley Kubrick was, without a doubt, a genius, but on the basis of this, he might have been a dirty old man, too. Real-life marrieds Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman play a wedded, well-to-do Manhattan couple who flirt with infidelity, and their onscreen chemistry is as unconvincing as it is offscreen.

Prompted by Kidman's admittance of yearning for an affair with a naval officer, Cruise sets out for late-night adventures of his own, coming across various prostitutes before winding up at some secret, sexual mansion with rules as strict as the *Fight Club*. Add a drug overdose and kidnapping one day later, and Cruise is on the verge of watching his picture-perfect world collapse.

At two-and-a-half hours, *Eyes* is clearly too long, especially given that if one removed all the pauses between the words of Kidman's dialogue, 30 minutes would be spared. Her role is the film's weakest ... and ... it ... doesn't ... help ... that ... she ... talks ... like ... this. *Stop it already, Red!* Cruise fares better, but still resorts to that squinty-eyed, smirk-of-a-smile thing of which he is so fond.

As for Kubrick, this is not even near his best work – visually fine, but lacking in story – so it's a shame he had to sign off with a picture this uninvolving. Its first hour is pointless, its second hour intermittently suspenseful and creepy, and then its final half-hour a letdown, punctuated by the last line of dialogue (belonging to Kidman) being "Fuck." I kinda felt the same way.

Videos reviewed in HITCH receive star ratings based not on artistic merit, but on levels of enjoyment, from ★☆☆☆☆ (as much fun as a funeral) to ★★★★★ (fun, fun, fun 'til daddy takes the TV away).

The Blair Witch Project
(1999)
Artisan Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

"Tell me you have the map."
"I don't have the map!"
"You don't have the fucking map?"
"I don't have the fucking map!"
"Seriously, you don't have the fucking map?"

The Blair Bitch

"I'm telling you, I don't have the fucking map!"

"Hey, look over there, off-camera! *AAAAIIIIEEEE!!!!*"

Neither written, directed nor scary, *The Blair Witch Project* is the year's most overrated film. Gotta love the ending, though.

Captured
(1999)
Avalanche Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

A rich man traps a car thief in his vehicle with a custom-made security system so that he can torture the criminal for kicks. This premise would seem to make for an interesting one-act morality play, but unfortunately, they got the guy who starred in *Ghoulies* to direct it. So basically, it's Stingray (Nick Mancuso) vs. Wishmaster (Andrew Divoff) in a game of carmageddon!

It's fun to see Mancuso throw hard metal objects at Divoff's freakishly large head. It's not so fun to see anything that takes place outside of the garage, though. By the time it ends, there are about three or four dead bodies in the house, one of which is one of our leads, whose death by another character is just flat-out illogical. I don't buy it.

The Last Road
(1997)
N/A
★★☆☆☆

Told through lots of flashbacks, *The Last Road* is the poignant and touching tale of a woman (Julie Strain) who loses her true love to a fiery car crash in a race. Despite all the drama, Strain finds plenty of time to strip down and simulate sex.

Of course, the real draw here is the very large and very real chest of former *Playboy* Playmate Petra Verkaik. She shakes them around so much in her sex scene that you'd think she was co-starring in *Earthquake*. Even more bizarre, her partner pushes a Hot Wheels up and around her cleavage while they make car noises! And they do it under a poster of the George Romero/Dario Argento film *Two Evil Eyes*!

The Last Road also stars, according to the credits, "Frank as The Man on the Roof" and Verkaik's fellow Playmate Suzi Simpson, whose nipples are so pointy that don't just say "Hello!" but also "Hi, I'm a compass, and north is this way!"

Howling V: The Rebirth
(1989)
IVE Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Howling VI: The Freaks
(1991)
IVE Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Out of the seven – or is it 14? – *Howling* films made to date, guess how many of them are good? Yep, just the original. Most of that may have something to do with the fact that none of the sequels had *nothing* to do with the first one. And part of *that* may have something to do with the fact that they're all so cheap-looking and amateurish.

As *Howling V* opens centuries ago, a Budapest castle is the site of a mass werewolf slaying. A man and his wife, apparently the

poor hosts, kill themselves so that the slaughter cannot continue. But wait! What about the baby? Flash-forward to present day and a group of people meet at the castle for what I'm sure is a very good reason, but I nodded off at that part. There's a dim-bulb actress, a he-man tennis player, the token black, etc. Together and separately, they walk through the castle's catacombs, bicker and, on occasion, get killed by a werewolf.

But which one of the castle's "guests" is doing the killing? To save you the time, it's exactly who you think it is. Thank me later.

Only by a hair is *Howling VI* better. It has a cool beginning, with a woman running through the forest in slo-mo, before she trips and eats it. The plot centers around a drifter-cum-werewolf (though not the werewolf from *Howling V*, mind you) who unwittingly joins a circus of freaks. The freaks include a half-man/half-woman, an alligator man, a midget with three arms and Antonio Fargas, who carries bugs in a little box and calls them his "babies." To initiate their new werewolf co-worker, the freaks cage him up and throw eggs at him, as freaks are wont to do, I suppose.

When he turns into the werewolf, he looks almost nothing like a werewolf and almost everything like the spawn of Alice Cooper and Ron Perlman, as seen in TV's *Beauty and the Beast*. This still doesn't prevent him from getting laid, though. He almost eats a cat for the delight of his audience.

Mindbenders: Scary Drug Education Films from the 60's, Volume One
(1996)
Something Weird Video
★★★☆☆

Mindbenders: Scary Drug Education Films from the 60's, Volume Two
(1996)
Something Weird Video
★★★☆☆

If LSD *really* provokes hallucinations of tarantulas and Orientals – as suggested in the FDA's *The Mind-Benders: LSD and the Hallucinogens* – then count me out! Furthermore, it leads to parties with sitars, which we all know means terrible music, games of Go and open-mouthed droolers. One user talks about the time he was having sex and his lady friend morphed into a "flesh-dripping monster face." (Obviously, he's not used to marriage.)

High schoolers' interest in model planes wanes as they're turned on to the drug in *"LSD": Trip or Trap?*. Peer pressure is tough to ignore, but not as tough as the mod girl who takes a post-trip visit to the hospital with oozing pustules on her hand, or the photo montage of deformed babies whose pregnant mothers were sucking tabs.

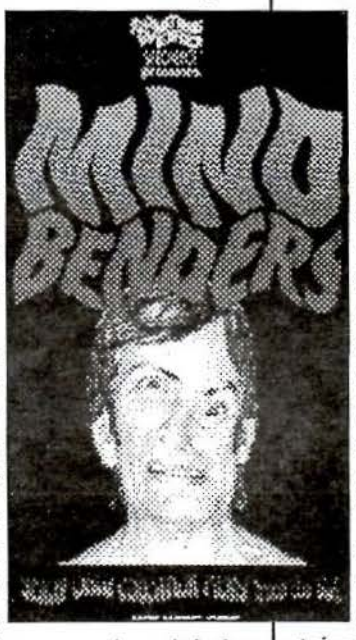
In *LSD: The Trip to Where?*, scientists express their desire to see how LSD would affect monkeys. Hell, *who wouldn't*, science degree or no science degree? Timothy Leary is interviewed, but even he is dwarfed by the presence of B-movie legend Richard Lynch, who admits to being an LSD freak (gee, from his bravura performances in the likes of *Puppet Master 3* and *Scanner Cop*, I *never* would've guessed) who set himself on fire. Even this short's director appears onscreen at the end to fess up that he dropped a dose in order to know about the subject he was filming.

In *The Haunting*, Lili Taylor is menaced by Magic Fingers.

Lastly, there's the cleverly titled *LSD*, a military-issued diatribe against the drug in which some squeaky-clean, apple-pie officer stands by a blackboard and talks to the camera. Yep, this is a *lecture*, so we finally learn just what "LSD" must stand for: Lectures Suck ... well, you know the rest.

So if LSD is so bad, why do the four films in *Volume Two* all associate it with cool animation and groovy music? Visually, *Acid* is as out-there as any Hollywood sci-fi film of the era, with lots of whacked-out acid trips recreated for the camera. We also see lab rats on a hit, men running through fields screaming and two hippies going apeshit over an anthill. A black guy tripping keeps looking at his hand and twirling a rose, while an artist draws a picture of a fetus about to be clawed by monsters ... and all without an NEA grant!

LSD-25 uses the novel gimmick of having the narrator be the drug itself! To wit: "In just a few moments, I will show him glimpses of distorted beauty ... or tumble him into a private hell!" A mop-topped lad on a bum trip squawks like a chicken and screams, "Get me outta this terrible place!" A faked transaction makes it look as though the pusher was selling cubes of beef bouillon.



Rebel without a life Sal Mineo narrates *LSD: Insight or Insanity?* He doesn't appear onscreen, but if he did, I wish he'd wear his monkey getup from *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, just to screw with the heads of anyone who might be imbibing while watching this short. After swallowing goldfish and ironing their hair, the teens-on-acid here hallucinate about taking a tricycle spill down the stairs or being locked in a fridge. One girl boiling eggs suddenly mistakes the gas flame for a flower. Pretty! If scenes of cliff-jumping and running in front of cars isn't enough to make you forego tripping, howzabout some pics of deformed rat fetuses? It all ends in a fatal game of Russian roulette.

No less an outfit than the U.S. Navy was behind *Trip to Where*, which details three buddies who drop a dose or two. According to this, at worst, you'll think you're being chased by sword-wielding thugs on horseback or see yourself as a girl when you look in a mirror. And at best, you'll be plopped into something resembling the series finale of *Twin Peaks*, minus finger-snapping midgets.

The Haunting
(1999)
DreamWorks Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

Imagine the scariest movie ever made. Now imagine something entirely different, and you have Jan de Bont's *The Haunting*, a remake of the '60s Robert Wise classic. To call this version tepid would be an insult to the word "tepid."

Liam Neeson, appearing in this film for no apparent reason, is conducting an experiment in fear, under the guise of an insomnia study. (The film itself would cure the characters' sleeping troubles.) Thus, Neeson brings woman-child Lili Taylor, foxy lesbian Catherine Zeta-Jones and what's-with-that-nose Owen Wilson to a big spooky house inhabited by spirits of an evil old man and several dead kids that all sound like Heather O'Rourke in *Poltergeist*.

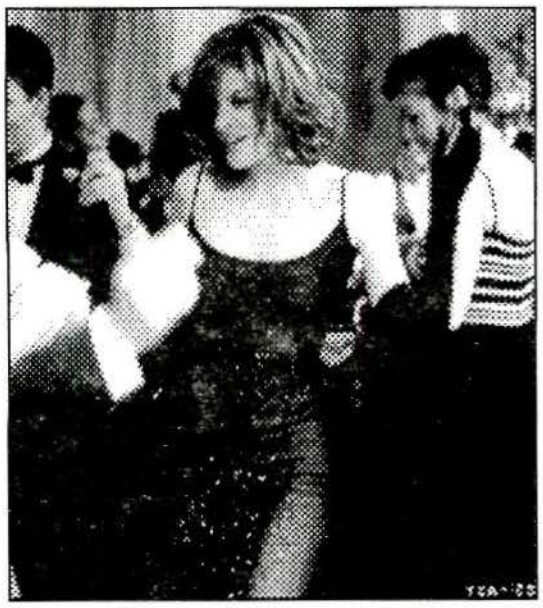
There's an incredibly long setup, which might have been fine if it had actually *set up* something. But there are no scares – Ooh! Look out for that creaky staircase! – and even less suspense. The

effects look like effects, and the dialogue is the worst you're likely to hear. For example, at the climax, Taylor confronts the ghosts by screaming, "Come and get me, Grandpa! It's all about family! It's all about caring!" I couldn't hear what she said next because I was laughing too hard, but it's followed by a death scene cast shot in a Precious Moments-like flair.

It would have helped tremendously if the house came equipped with lasers for Cath to slink under, but at least Wilson gets decapitated, hilariously. At one point, Taylor mentions she's spent 12 years in Purgatory. After this, I think I know how she felt.

The Thomas Crown Affair
(1999)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Further trying to convince himself that people want to pay to see Pierce Brosnan in anything other than a James Bond film,



Rene Russo, in a rare, un-naked moment from *Thomas Crown*.

Brosnan produced this remake of the old Steve McQueen movie, which explains why he goes shirtless a lot.

So does his co-star, Rene Russo, but I'm not complaining on that note.

Brosnan is a suave, rich, lonely man who enjoys stealing paintings from art museums. When a Monet is swiped in an elaborate heist, Russo shows up as the hottest insurance investigator in the world. The heist takes up roughly the first 30 minutes, and is a fun, long sequence.

But then the romance kicks in, and there's nothing to like except the occasional and utterly gratuituous yet marvelous glimpse of Russo's breasts.

Brosnan is awfully unlikable, so you'll be disappointed by the fact that he gets off scot-free (and if that comes a surprise to you, you are this film's target market). The ending is a total cop-out that had me running for the exit.

Snow White: A Tale of Terror
(1997)
PolyGram Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

Forgetting Disney, *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* retells the children's favorite by using its original, dark, Grimm's origins as a springboard. (Hence, there are no seven dwarves; only one.) The Gothic atmosphere that results is welcome, but the story's pacing lags so much you'll be praying for a musical number to spice things up.

Sigourney Weaver marries royal widower Sam Neill. Before you get married, you should ask things like, "Do you want children?" and "What church would you like to attend?," but apparently, you should also add to that list questions like, "Are you really a haggardly old witch in disguise?" and "Are you fond of talking to dead babies?" Because Sig would have to answer yes, and the whole ugly matter that unfolds could have been avoided.

Weaver spends the film making life hell for Neill's daughter Lily (aka Snow), played by *Dawson Creek*'s Monica Keena. Needless to say, they don't along, so Weaver tries to bury her in dirt, cut out her heart, kill her with a poison apple and all that other good stuff that'll get you a guest shot on *Springer*. She just never succeeds, which makes for a less interesting movie, although it does end with Sigourney getting a blast of broken glass right to the face.

Progeny
(1999)
Sterling Home Entertainment
★★★☆☆

If *Progeny* were a tabloid story, the headline would be "I Was Sexed-Up by an Alien!" Just like in *The Astronaut's Wife*, a woman finds that the baby brewing inside her is of otherworldly origins. But unlike that film, *Progeny* has Wilford Brimley as a gynecologist.

That fact is unsettling enough (I mean, wouldn't all his mustache whiskers fall in?), but *Progeny*'s makers (*Re-Animator* vets) go one further by showing Brimley at work, swabbing vaginas with Q-Tips and asking "Have you been using any special douches or suppositories?" in much the same way he might quiz you about eating your oatmeal.

But Arnold Vosloo – that odd-looking South African who has played both *Darkman* and *The Mummy* – is the real star, who suspects from the start that his wife's fetus was not whipped up with his mighty seed. In fact, he seems to remember quite well the night when he was humping his betrothed. They were interrupted by a white light, and then mysterious forces lifted his naked ass off of her, allowing someone else to come in and finish the job. This, I believe, is the first mid-copulation levitation on cinematic record, and it's followed later by several instant replays, as well as one bloody Cesarean.

Classroom Scare Films, Volume 5: More Drug Evils
(1997)
Something Weird Video
★★★★☆

Awwwww, freak out! Noted Percocet hound Sonny Bono, replete in shiny orange suit, dishes about *Marijuana* and how its users are cooler than those "square and unhip alcoholics." Still, the film illustrates the downsides to grass, such as seeing yourself in a mirror with a spooky monster mask, careening off a cliff or – in the case of one Nigerian pusher – executed. You also see a monkey taking bong hits in a lab. But *Narcotics – The Inside Story* shows you a bunch of rats hopped up on pills, while happy-go-lucky teenagers enjoy a seemingly unrelated beach blanket barbecue.

David Hartman narrates *Focus on Heroin*, which addresses that nagging argument that milk leads to heroin use. *Huh?* If you're *Thinking about Drinking*, this little film makes it all the more attractive with appealing Colorform-type illustrations. *The PCP Story* interviews several (ab)users, all of whom look like Aerosmith roadies. One snaggletoothed chick says she likes the drug because "I can laugh and be goofy." At least it doesn't make her look like Eric Stoltz from *Mask*, as one user who is interviewed during his "trip." He's asked how he feels; he answers with a smile, "I'm being photographed!"

Rounding out this chemical collection are trailers from feature-length scare flicks, including *The Pusher*, *Marihuana*, *The People Next Door* and *Mary Jane*, starring – of all people – Fabian. Hey, if Sonny can do it...

Alien Arsenal
(1998)
Full Moon Releasing
★★☆☆☆

In the basement of their high school during "Introduction to Menial Labor" class (what is this, Kathie Lee High?), a nerdy boy and his tomboy gal pal find a room full of

alien weapons behind a brick wall. The arsenal is comprised primarily of guns that zap people into oblivion, but there are also gloves that, when worn, befit the wearer with an indestructible, robot-like supersuit.

So these two picked-upon outcasts go roaming around the halls like the king and queen of RoboProm, righting wrongs and taking revenge on the bullies who have made their lives living hells. One such jerk is a jock named Flash – who even wears T-shirts with lightning-bolt insignias! The nerdy boy also uses the costume to pick up 'tang.

Alien Arsenal is a strange mix of *She's All That* and *StarKid*, but scads more entertaining. Even still, that's not saying much. With terrible acting and inane dialogue – kids just do not say things like "Flash Gunderson can snap your spine like a Slim Jim at a Weight Watchers' meeting" – it's an uphill battle to stay attentive ... much like algebra class itself.

Teletubbies: Here Come the Teletubbies
(1997)
Warner Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

You can take the subtitle one of two ways: 1) May I please introduce you to the Teletubbies? or 2) *Run for the hills! Those creepy alien things are coming!*

A majority of the world likely would opt

for the latter, inexplicably bothered by the mere sight of these pasty-faced, rotund, pajama-footed beings that all look and walk like they're carrying a load in their drawers. For the uninitiated, there are four of these Teletubbies: Tinky Winky, the gay one; Dipsy, the one with the dildo-looking thing on his head; La-La, the one with the twisted dildo-looking thing on her head; and Po, the tiny one who is probably molested by all the others with their omnipresent vacuum cleaner.

Like all Teletubbies adventures, there are no plots here; the asexual creatures simply roam around the hills outside their home, happen upon something, spout baby talk and giggle. (Occasionally, they deem it fit to smack pelvises.) In one such sojourn, Tinky Winky comes across Po's scooter. "What's that?" asks the unseen narrator, to which Tinky Winky replies laughingly in his broken English, "Po cooter!"

I shit you not, that's what he says. Maybe Jerry Falwell does have a point. Since this is followed by Tinky Winky discovering one of La-La's balls, I think someone's trying to pull a fast one.

At one point, one of the Teletubbies spills some tubby custard. This prompts our monotone narrator to ask "Who spilled the tubby custard?" and again, "Who spilled the tubby custard?" and then about a dozen more times after that, "Who spilled the tubby custard?" *For God's sakes, will someone please tell him who spilled the fucking tubby custard!?!*

Black Mask
(1996)
Artisan Home Entertainment
★★★☆☆

Basically Hong Kong's answer to *Batman*, *Black Mask* stars Jet Li (*Lethal Weapon 4*) as a member of the 701 Squad, a group of super soldiers genetically altered to feel no pain. As the film begins, Li has left his past behind and taken up a quiet existence as a librarian. It is only when hundreds of drug dealers are murdered and his cop friend is in danger that he deems it necessary to once again don the black mask, overcoat and Kato-like cap. Much loud kicking commences.

Whenever it's in full-action mode, *Black Mask* is a comic book – bright, splashy and violent. But when it tries to work in a silly romance, it just loses steam. Luckily, there's plenty of martial-arts mayhem to provide punches of excitement. I could do without the rap soundtrack, added only for the film's Americanization.

The Eternal: Kiss of the Mummy
(1998)
Trimark Home Video
★★★★☆

Truth be told, there's even less mummy in this one than in *Bram Stoker's The Mummy* (see last issue), but there is a reanimated corpse, and besides, the subtitle was just tacked on by the video company to ride the *Mummy*-mania wave.

Surprisingly effective and stylish, *The Eternal* begins simply as a dysfunctional family tale, with Jared Harris, Alison Elliott and son taking a trip to visit the family in Ireland while to try to quit hitting the sauce. The fam lives in an enormous and foreboding castle. The uncle is played by Christopher Walken, so the minute he shows his face, you know what that means: *Freak's on!*

Walken keeps himself occupied in the basement with a female dead body. Somehow, it comes back to life and becomes a dead ringer for Elliott. So for a while, there are two of her running around this castle, unbeknownst to the others. While this has all the setup of an episode of *Three's Company*, it is at this point that *The Eternal* takes a sharp turn into thinking man's horror.

Hardcore horror fans will be disappointed, but this is a horror movie for the crowd that considers itself too highbrow for such films. Besides, it's all an allegory for alcoholism, anyway. But make no mistake: It is very well-made.

The Awakening
(1980)
Warner Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Chuck Heston vs. a mummy. Who *wouldn't* pay to see that? Truth is, however, this is a tale of Chuck the archaeologist and his daughter (Stephanie Zimbalist), who is merely *possessed* by the spirit of a mummy, rather than being an actual mummy herself.

You see, while Chuck's wife was in labor with the child, ol' gritty-teeth Heston was underneath some pyramids, raiding sarcophagi and whatnot. The baby was stillborn, but at that very second, Chuck fooled around with some mummy, and lo and behold, its spirit entered that of the dead tot and damned if the cute little thing didn't come to life!

Then, years and years later, Steph starts acting funky – "awakening," one might say. Then she unleashes her wrath and Chuck gets smashed by a pillar or something. It's much better when I sum it up like that in a one-minute read; unfortunately, this short-on-action story is so long that any awakening on the viewer's part is hard-earned.

Virus
(1999)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★☆☆☆

I call for a ban on the *Alien* wannabes, with *Virus* being the worst of the recent offenders. In what has become so rote, an alien lifeforce takes over cramped quarters of some sort – in this case, a ship – and begins to kill off its inhabitants at a quick clip. Hollywood should know that when those inhabitants include Billy Baldwin and various minorities, no one gives a rat's ass whether they live or die.

Okay, that's not entirely true: In the case of Baldwin, we root for the alien.

Jamie Lee Curtis takes the Sigourney

Instead of Gore, Go *Mental*

Former *Film Threat* editor Chris Gore examines what Hollywood movies you might have loved ... had they ever been made. The wholly arbitrary *The 50 Greatest Movies Never Made* (St. Martin's, $13.95) examines such aborted classics as *Casablanca 2*, *The Silver Surfer* and the John Hughes-scripted *National Lampoon's Jaws 3, People 0*.

Gore's idea is a terrific one, and the result is usually entertaining. But his delivery suffers from a cloying, know-it-all attitude and a rash of inexcusable factual errors and typos that made me wonder, "Did *anyone* edit this book?"

Having no such problems is the thoroughly researched and wholly satisfying *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945-1970* (Blast Books, $24.95) by Ken Smith. Focused on the great lost art of classroom films, it's like the *Psychotronic Encyclopedia* for this beloved but dead genre.

The films themselves – *Signal 30, Dating Do's & Don'ts, LSD-25*, etc. – are largely MIA, seen mostly today via compilation tapes from Something Weird Video (as oft-reviewed in these pages) or preceding features on old episodes of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

Smith gives a historical explanation on how these films came to be (and why they went away), delves into the subgenres (sex, drugs, dating and driver safety), spotlights some of the filmmakers and then – in the real meat of the book – reviews *hundreds* of these shorts, with an expert balance of respect and ridicule.

Wonderfully packaged and not lacking in photo illustrations from the films themselves, *Mental Hygiene* is a must-own, sharp-looking tome for film buffs.

You'll be hooked from the start and read it cover to cover, which is highly unusual for review collections such as this.

Princess Mononoke has all the hallmarks of Japanese anime: the doe-eyed heroine, fine attention to detail, coked-out images.

Weaver role as the unwitting headstrong female who has a bigger dick than any of the others. Donald Sutherland is the ship's captain, who, like many of his crew, becomes a cyborg when he is infected by the robot-like aliens, which reminded me of the electronic spiders from that Tom Selleck movie *Runaway*.

Based on a comic book I've never even heard of, *Virus* is nothing you haven't seen before and done much better.

Princess Mononoke
(1997)
Miramax Home Video
★★★☆☆

Had it been 1.5 hours instead of 2.5 hours, I probably would have liked *Princess Mononoke* more. There are lots of fantastic images in this Japanese animated epic – the biggest Japanese film ever made – but it goes on for *so* long that its flaws grow right along with the running time.

I don't have the energy to rehash the story, but it has something to do with a young boy who goes to faraway lands to search for a cure for a disease that's killing him because he came into contact with a pig with worms. Or something like that.

Trust me, there are times you'll swear you're on hallucinogens, especially with the appearance of the "tree spirits," naked albino sprites with rotary-dial heads who resemble Pillsbury Doughboys with an extra chromosome.

The severely miscast Claire Danes, Billy Bob Thornton and Jada Pinkett-Smith (A sassy geisha? *Brilliant!*) provide some of the voices of the characters, who generally love trees and animals and deep down inside, despise war.

So as it stands, *Mononononononoke* amounts to an overlong Greenpeace commercial made by Easterners with an affinity for 'shrooms. Great effort is spent establishing a mythology that is never fully explained. In all fairness, this may have been lost in the translation – or, as a friend told me – "maybe it's something your honky, cracker ass just can't understand."

"But how can you give it anything less than a rave?" you purists might say. "It's the highest-grossing Japanese film of all-time!" Yes, but the Japanese also eat raw fish, idolize Michael Jackson and sex up schoolgirls.

Six-String Samurai
(1998)
Palm Pictures
★☆☆☆☆

Six-String Samurai is one of those cult festival hits. Maybe I was just tired when I got around to seeing it, but I found it incredibly dull. In a revisionist twist, the film takes place in the apocalyptic wasteland of America, under Russian control since the '50s, with Vegas as its capital and Elvis as its King. But years later, Elvis dies and several scrubs make their way to Vegas to vie for the throne.

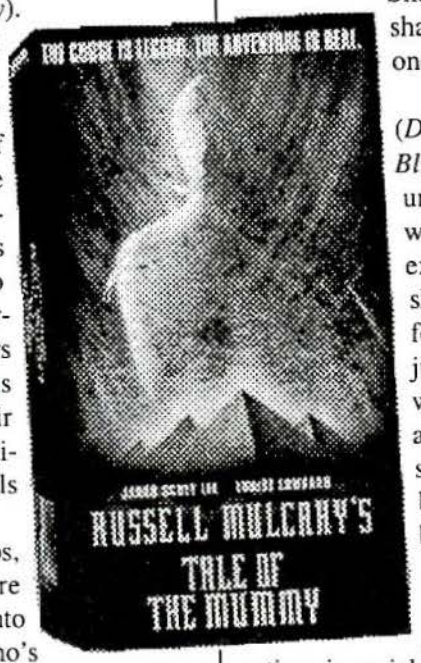
Chief among them is a Buddy Holly lookalike who is adept at both sword-slinging and guitar-playing. He also has mad kung-fu skills and is being followed by a mute, orphan boy who wants to go with him. Together, they traverse the desert and come across all sorts of ne'er-do-wells who want to kill them. Fighting ensues.

It sounds like it would be cool, but God, is it ever boring. The dialogue is quip-heavy, the action too cartoony and the script short on ideas. I'm convinced it would make a great short film, but at 90 minutes, this really pushed my limits. It tries far too hard to be weird and different, and succeeds so much that it fails.

Russell Mulcahy's Tale of the Mummy
(1998)
Dimension Home Video
★★★★☆

Resurrection
(1999)
Columbia/Tristar Home Video
★★★★☆

When it comes to directors, Russell Mulcahy is as unreliable as they come. I haven't enjoyed a single one of his movies – not *Highlander*, not *The Real McCoy* and especially not *The Shadow*. So the prospect of seeing a film where he had the gall to put his name in the title was not one to which I looked forward. But surprise of all surprises, I really enjoyed his *Tale of the Mummy* (originally titled *Talos the Mummy*).



Another entry in a recent string of mummy movies, this *Tale* gives you your mummy's worth. In a brief prologue, Christopher Lee and his fellow archaeologists let loose the mummy's spirit, which causes them to crumble into dust. Fast-forward a couple hundred years to present day, and various Londoners are meeting their deaths via a computer-animated Ace bandage that flails about wildly.

As the victim count ups, the mummy takes more shape, eventually turning into what looks like a man who's been skinned alive. Jason Scott Lee is the investigator into the string (no pun intended) of crimes; Shelly Duvall seems like mummy bait the second she shows up onscreen.

Taking a more Gothic approach to the mummy legend than Universal's latest revival ever dared, *Tale of the Mummy* is a pretty good B-movie, save for a final shot that deserves entry in the Stupid Final Shot Hall of Fame.

Either Mulcahy has gotten much better or something is wrong with me, but I also enjoyed his latest, the *Seven*-esque serial killer thriller *Resurrection*. Starring Mulcahy staple Christopher Lambert (whose presence almost always signals a bad movie), *Resurrection* is one of those films in which it rains a lot, and two detectives have to piece together bizarre, tell-tale clues to hunt down a twisted killer. In this case, he murders men who share names with apostles of the Bible, and he steals a limb from each in order to assemble his own makeshift body of Christ in time for Easter.

To my pleasant surprise, the film packs a twist I did not see coming. It also succeeds in being fairly creepy, helped tremendously by the bad guy's fondness for wearing a mask that makes him look like one of those PSA crash test dummies. When called upon to display extreme emotion, Lambert is laughable. But at least he's likable.

If only Mulcahy could give the camera a little rest once in a while, his rep might improve. Sadly, the awful ending that plagued his *Mummy* also does its damage here.

Deep Blue Sea
(1999)
Warner Home Video
★★★★☆

All three of the *Jaws* sequels sucked. Though not related to that series at all, *Deep Blue Sea* makes up for that trilogy of crap. Shark movies should deliver sharks, and lots of 'em; thus, this one succeeds.

Directed by Renny Harlin (*Die Hard 2*, *Cliffhanger*), *Deep Blue Sea* takes place at an underwater ocean laboratory, where a team of scientists experiment genetically with sharks, bent on finding a cure for Alzheimer's. But all this is just a MacGuffin, and you won't be paying attention to any of that. Soon enough, the sharks start turning cast members into chum, and the ride begins.

And that's all *Deep Blue Sea* ever intends to be. Its jolts are well-placed, the action is quick and the dialogue an afterthought. For once, who does and does not die may surprise you. Among the potential victims are shark wrangler Thomas Jane (*Boogie Nights*), who is cool; brainy doc Saffron Burrows, who strips to her underwear during one shark attack; visiting rich guy Samuel L. Jackson; and LL Cool J, basically replaying his *Halloween: H20* role, but this time with a parrot on his shoulder and malt liquor in one hand.

King Cobra
(1998)
Trimark Home Video
★★★★☆

When a science lab explodes with a surplus of serotonin, "Seth," a gene-spliced combo of a king cobra and diamondback rattlesnake grows to be 50 feet, gets loose and bites the crap outta townspeople with reckless abandon! He bites a kid, some old coot and his dog and a truckful of fat hunters, into whose eyes he also squirts venom.

Halfway into it, Pat Morita shows up as a mentor to a young boy from the East Coast who learns to overcome bullies via the power of martial arts. No, wait, that's not right. He plays a herpetologist who just stands there all woozy-like as the big-ass-fanged Seth bites him four times in succession.

Luckily, a goofy doc and his dyke-like cop girlfriend capture the snake in a metal, camouflage-painted tube and gas the sucker. Erik Estrada has a cameo as a gay man who carries around a shih tzu dog, and Hoyt Axton – several tubs of margarine since *Gremlins* – is the enormous-bellied mayor. During the end credits, Axton also sings the heartfelt tune "Seth Is the Devil," a song he wrote especially for the film. (Academy members need not take note.)

The main thing this has going for it is that it doesn't skimp on the snake. You see a lot of the wonderfully tacky reptile, who was created by the Chicodo brothers of *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* fame. *King Cobra* may be cheap, but it's a big, dumb, fun good-ol'-fashioned monster movie not seen since the likes of *Tremors* or *Arachnophobia*. I'm not sure the duo responsible for writing and directing *King Cobra* intended that, but tough. That's what they've got.

Curse of the Black Widow
(1977)
N/A
★★★★☆

The '70s were chock full of great made-for-TV movies involving spiders, and while not the best of that lot, *Curse of the Black Widow* has to be the most obscure. As it opens outside a bar, some spooky woman whose face we cannot see has her eyes glow orange and next thing you know, the guy she was standing next to is dead – as well as several other would-be paramours in the past.

Well, that's all it takes for private dick Tony Franciosa to be on the case. His investigations lead him to believe the crimes are being committed by one of two sisters, the Farrah-haired Donna Mills and the bull-dyke Patty Duke. If you can't guess which one it is, you obviously haven't seen many made-for-TV movies starring Patty Duke.

When Duke begins her morphing into a giant spider, this black widow mark just below her belly button starts to breathe creepily, then her eyes glow orange (as previously

mentioned). Then she's all eight-legged and puppet-looking, spitting a web-like substance. In the climax, Tony and Donna have it out with the freakish arachnid in a flaming basement.

Then we're treated to the obligatory "shock" ending, suggesting a sequel like *Curse of the Niece of the Black Widow* or something like that. Dan Curtis, *Dark Shadows* impresario, directed.

The Lullaby of Bareland
(1964)
Something Weird Video

★★★☆☆

Sort of a titty version of *Tales from the Crypt*, the three-tiered anthology *The Lullaby of Bareland* lets us in on the lecherous exploits of a suburban couple who don't have sex anymore.

In the first episode, the husband leaves home to go a strip show. He first watches a rather drawn-out striptease, followed by an excruciating, pun-heavy burlesque skit that I doubt any audience full of pent-up sexual aggression could sit through. The main attraction follows, however – that being the 48-inch busted wonder Virginia Bell.

Then we see a series of nude women being painted, all of whom have backsides that look as though they have been beaten with a ballpeen hammer.

In the second episode, the wife goes to frolic for the day at a nudist camp, where the agenda consists of swinging, swimming and trampolining. There she meets Anne Howe (*get it?*), whose 46-inch twins temporarily take over as the film's lead.

One of the girls there isn't nearly as busty as Howe, but the narrator theorizes that "maybe if she drinks lots of milk, one day she'll grow up to be" as bountiful.

In the last, unrelated episode, a janitor at a movie studio dreams he's auditioning young lovelies for a nudie movie. He makes a couple girls pose holding eggs and corn oil as he takes their picture. Another girl does kitchen calisthenics wearing nothing but an apron. Then all the girls go outside and play with a big ball – nothing subliminal there, my friends.

Ice Cream Man
(1995)
A-Pix Home Entertainment

★★☆☆☆

The demented horror flick *Ice Cream Man* opens with a quick flashback of a young boy witnessing his friendly neighborhood frozen-treat bearer getting gunned down in a drive-by shooting. "Who will deliver the ice cream now, Mommy?" the boy asks as he sits on the curb next to the lifeless body.

Jump ahead a few decades and that same boy has grown up to be the creepy Clint Howard, now an ice cream man in his own right, hand-dipping his special brand of dairy confections, complete with toppings like cockroaches and eyeballs. Needless to say, he kills people. This becomes painfully obvious when he puts David Naughton's severed head atop a waffle cone. Yes, kids, the Good Humor Man has given way to the Sick Humor Man, but he's not particularly funny, interesting or entertaining.

Wishmaster
(1997)
Artisan Home Entertainment

★★★☆☆

Wishmaster 2: Evil Never Dies
(1999)
Artisan Home Entertainment

★☆☆☆☆

The flipside of *I Dream of Jeannie*, the Wes Craven-produced *Wishmaster* has a centuries-old genie terrorizing citizens of greater Los Angeles after he is released accidentally from the jewel in which he lives. Basically resembling a scaly gargoyle, the Wishmaster – referred to only as "Djinn" in the movie – eventually takes human form and trick people by granting their every wish in the most literal and deadly sense.

One girl wanting eternal beauty is turned into a mannequin. A guy asking for a million dollars strikes it rich via insurance when his mom dies in a plane crash. You get the picture. Directed by special-effects whiz Robert Kurtzman (*From Dusk Till Dawn*), the movie is a lot better than you'd expect. It only grows tiresome in the third act, quips are kept to a minimum and there is no shock ending. As one would hope, the flick is filled with bloody good effects, including a skeleton that emerges through a man's body.

The on-the-cheap sequel, subtitled *Evil Never Dies*, is an embarrassment, suffering from an incredible dip in production values but a sizable increase in nihilism, culminating in an ugly casino-set bloodbath. The sporadically great Jack Shoulder (most notably of *The Hidden*) has fallen out of favor by several notches.

Golfballs! The Movie
(1999)
Key East Entertainment

★☆☆☆☆

You'd think *Caddyshack II* would have forever banished raunchy golf comedies to oblivion, but along comes *Golfballs! The Movie* to change all that. It's kind of like *The Bikini Car Wash Company* in that a failing business singlehandedly is revived by a business plan centered around topless, dancing skanks. Okay, so it's *exactly* like *The Bikini Car Wash Company*.

In the case of *Golfballs! The Movie*, a financially strapped golf course is losing members to a more prestigious, snooty country club. Fortunes reverse when the underdog course employs a host of buxom women to wash golf carts in the buff. Leading this cadre is former *Penthouse* Pet Amy Lynn Baxter, who has the catchy phrase "WE ❤ TIPS" painted on her left breast. Any one of these horse-faced honeys is apt to start stripping upon hearing the first notes of a Monster Ballad. Following in the great tradition of *Smokey and the Bandit*, outrageous, pee-your-pants (yes, I'm being facetious) bloopers unspool during the end credits.

If I have to tell you a lot of "shaft" and "ball" jokes are made, and that intrigues you, there's a veritable treasure of humor for you to mine here. You're just gonna *love* the Chihuahua with diarrhea! You also may find it tricky to follow the story, but boy, are *you* in luck – a Bill Murray-like groundskeeper characters (only very fat and not funny) talks to the camera to help you along.

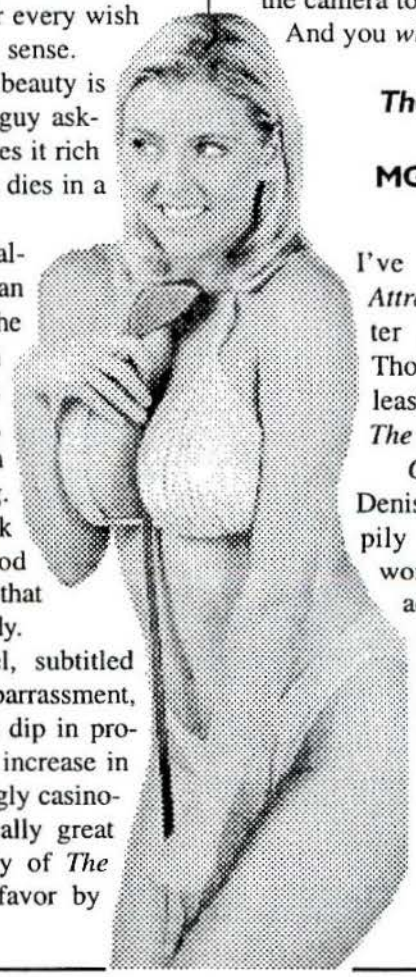
And you *will* need help.

The Corporate Ladder
(1997)
MGM/UA Home Video

★★☆☆☆

I've long contended *Fatal Attraction* would have been a better movie with better breasts. Though failing, Playboy Films at least gave my theory a try with *The Corporate Ladder*.

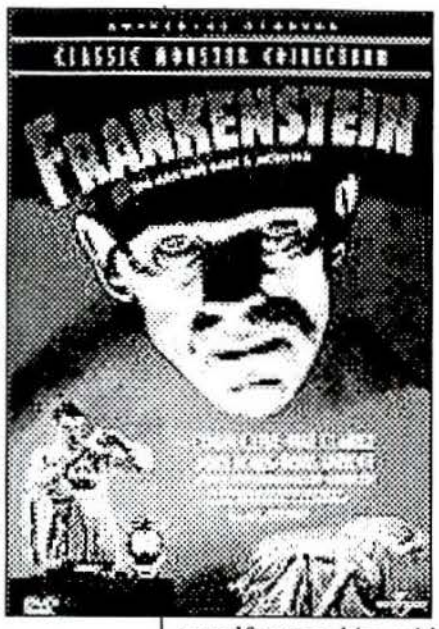
Crime Story's Anthony John Denison stars as a greasy yet happily married advertising exec working to land a big jeans account. He's in the fruitless process of hiring a new assistant when, finally, comely Kathleen Kinmont walks through his door. *Va-va-voom, you're hired!*



Golfballs! star Amy Lynn Baxter: Let the stroke jokes begin.

She not only helps him tremendously with his work, but she's also quite skilled at after-hours stripteases in the office. (Was that listed on her resume?) Too bad she's a total wacko with an instinct to get jealous and kill! Just ask fellow worker Ben Cross. Oops, too late – he's floating dead in the pool after being beaten over the head by Kinmont with a champagne bottle.

You can guess how it all ends, partly because it follows the formula and partly because Kinmont just isn't an actress from whom we can expect twists and turns. Face it, she's here because she doesn't have a problem with the nudity. And I don't either, but they could have thrown in a boiling rabbit, too.



Frankenstein
(1931)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★★

The Mummy
(1932)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

The Wolf Man
(1941)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

Studios are seeing gold in reissuing old films on DVD, and Universal is giving its classic monsters the deluxe treatment. First out of the gate are *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy* and *The Wolf Man*. For films nearly 70 years old, you'd be amazed at how extra-heavy these releases are.

In James Whale's definitive *Frankenstein*, scientist Colin Clive assembles a man out of spare corpses and awakens him from the dead via a bolt of lightning. The creature (as played by Boris Karloff) at first seems gentle enough, but by the time he's drowned a little girl and tried to kill his creator, it's apparent this was one birth that should have been aborted. A classic in gothic horror and atmosphere, Whale's film holds up magnificently. It's also apparent that we have long taken Karloff for granted, because the performance he delivered as the monster is solid and heartfelt.

Karloff also stars in *The Mummy* as the mummy, who is awakened from a 3,000-year sleep and sets out to stake his claim on his reincarnated girlfriend. Though the only time Karloff is in mummy form is in the beginning, the plot is supernatural enough to keep things interesting.

It's Lon Chaney Jr.'s turn in the makeup chair for *The Wolf Man*, in which a bite from a wolf curses him with the ability to turn into a wolf himself at night and kill those he loves. As expected, the atmosphere is terrific, and the wolf attacks are surprisingly violent for the time.

All three films feature the original theatrical trailer, commentaries from film historians and excellent half-hour documentaries on their lasting influence. *Frank* also boasts an old comedy short entitled *Boo!*, which fuses footage from this film and *Nosferatu* for pun-laden purposes. It doesn't succeed, but it's a true rarity.

The Thing
(1982)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing* owes a great deal to *Alien*, from its premise on down, but it's a great movie in its own right. Creepier than it is scary, it stands up there with *Halloween* and the *Escape* films as Carpenter's best work.

Regular player Kurt Russell emerges as the lead among a team of government researchers in the Antarctic. Among the facility's labyrinth of halls is an alien monster, able to mutate itself to imitate the bodies of its various hosts, to the point where the line between human and creature is blurred past detection.

It is when the thing makes itself known that gives the film its jolts. The effects are shockingly good and gory, capped by the finest human-torso-chomps-off-man's-arms scene in all of cinema. If *The Thing* suffers, it's from having too many characters. Some seem to disappear without explanation; others die gruesome deaths before they've had a chance to distinguish themselves from the pack.

But the looming suspense and icy pacing work well for Carpenter in creating an overall ominous mood of "anything can happen, at any time." Carpenter is a director I always look forward to, even though he disappoints me half the time. Having most recently shamed himself with *Vampires*, it's nice to revisit one of his peaks.

Black Scorpion II: Aftershock
(1996)
New Horizons Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

If *Blair Witch* gave you motion sickness, you're going to spew buckets during *Black Scorpion II*, the most unsettling sequel to the pretty decent '95 Roger Corman production starring Joan Severance and her massive cleavage as a cop turned costumed crime-fighter of the night.

I'm not sure what this "director" (Jonathan Winfrey) was thinking by constantly and needlessly moving the camera. Either he was influenced by *NYPD Blue* or he's just plain a rung below Albert Pyun. (You've heard the legend of Corman telling his directors, "If you do a good job, you'll never have to work for me again"? Well, this guy has worked for Rog at least *five times*.) Scenes set in the police station take on a terribly cartoony "quality," like a sitcom shot with softcore-porn lighting, a marked difference from the original's comparatively serious tone. But it's really all just filler until Joan dons what little costume she has to become a superhero.

And when she does, the movie gets even worse. For one thing, she seems to have her own theme song now, a blatant rip-off of "Lust for Life." (Iggy Pop, put down the smack long enough to call your lawyers.) For another, she's stuck battling a villain known as The Prankster. He looks like Two-Face and acts like The Joker, and damned if he doesn't like those wonderful toys. His character is given no origin or setup – he's just there, as if they wanted to get to the kicking as soon as possible.

The *Aftershock* of the subtitle refers to a rash of earthquakes plaguing the city, but honestly, I didn't feel it was worth a late fee to find out exactly why. Long story short, this isn't up to Corman's usual production values, and God knows I never thought I'd ever write a line like that. The fact that I've worked with the flick's DP only compounds my astounding frustration level. If I see him again, he's going to have lots of 'splaining to do.

The Best of Just Kidding: Volume One
(1995)
N/A
★★☆☆☆

Judging from the slapstick antics of this

Candid Camera rip-off, that theory about the French worshipping Jerry Lewis may hold a lot of merit. The largely wordless antics of *Just Kidding* wring laughs (or at least attempt to) out of humiliating strangers.

Some of the gags are elementary – spraying the back of necks with water to simulate a nasty sneeze or stealing groceries from another shopper's cart. But the few really good bits are the more morbid ones, such as when the undercover pranksters pick up hitchhikers and take them for an out-of-control ride or when they spray whipped cream in the faces of people sampling waffles. I also love watching people react to fake spiders hanging in front of them. That's classic, no matter how you slice it.

But most of *Just Kidding* isn't. The nice thing is, the segments are so bite-sized that if one is less than ideal, wait about 60 seconds.

Tricks
(1997)
Paramount Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Okay, reality check time here: How can you stick Mimi Rogers in an R-rated, made-for-cable movie about a Vegas call girl and *not* show her naked? There is one scene of nudity, but I think it's a body double. Screaming Mimi let it all hang out throughout *Full Body Massage*, so it's only natural we expect her *au naturel*.

Mimi plays a showgirl-turned-whore turning tricks to support her young son and a bloated animal that sits on her couch and eats all her food, played by Tyne Daly. After giving an Oriental tourist a blowjob, she is called up to a rich man's hotel room. You'd think this was where the good ol' gratuitous nudity would begin, but no! Just as Rogers prepares to remove her undergarments, her john says, "Leave it on." *Th'fuck?* What is this, *science fiction?*

Anyway, the guy beats the crap out of her, which results in Mimi's fridge getting emptier and emptier, because who would want to have sex with Mimi Rogers if she had bruises on her face? (Hey, over here! My hand's raised!)

America's Funniest Home Videos Uncensored
(1999)
Real Entertainment
★★★★★

Prepare to wet your pants. You could watch all 10 years worth of *America's Funniest Home Videos* episodes and not get as many laughs as you will out of *AFHV Uncensored*, a bizarre and long overdue collection of R-rated clips that never saw air. (Some, but by no means all, were seen on the early-'90s must-have bootleg, *America's Funniest White Trash Home Videos*, reviewed in HITCH 15.)

These clips include lots of nudity, with breasts popping out of tops and naked frat guys skiing. Whatever possessed these people to tape these things in the first place, much less *send them in for possible broadcast air* is a strong argument for selective segregation.

And for once, *AFHV* realizes and acknowledges such. With that pansy host Bob Saget nowhere to be found, this tape's host states with deadpan glee that the folks who sent these tapes in are "morons," "scum" and "the lowest of the low."

He refers mostly to the rednecks who set off a whole mess of fireworks (the real deal, not Black Cats) and ended up exploding a house. And the dad who, in the middle of the night, awakens his young kids wearing a spooky mask and wielding a chainsaw after they've just seen *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. And the Joe Sixpack who casually dumps gasoline on a fire and erupts in laughter when his arm catches aflame. And probably even the sky-high, ganja-crazy, glassy-eyed hippie couple who can't seem to stop laughing during their impromptu wedding.

But such appellations can be extended to the animal kingdom, where you'll find a walrus masturbating heartily in full view of a zoo tour, an overactive monkey who pees all over his cage's window as he swings from tree to tree and, most memorably (despite valiant efforts to the contrary), the elephant who sticks his trunk up another elephant's butt, removes a sizable glob of poop and then eats it.

Not *all* the clips are of a mature subject matter, but I'm not complaining when the filler is of such quality comedy as a wedding video of Granny's hair burning as she gets too close to the candles. Expect lots of animals humping other animals, household objects and the occasional human head. Expect lots of babies demonstrating the art of projectile vomiting. Expect guilt-ridden fun.

The Tom Green Show: Something Smells Funny
(1999)
MTE Entertainment
★★★☆☆

In his pre-MTV days, Tom Green hosted a show on a Canadian cable comedy channel that's every bit like his current one. Which is to say, interesting but pointless.

Tom Green is neither a comedian nor talk-show host. He has no discernible talent. What he says or does is not particularly funny, nor will one accuse him of possessing a razor-sharp wit. But what he has the balls to do in public to total strangers is near-amazing.

In the best bit among the hour of rapid-fire segments here, Tom asks a crippled drunk where he's going. Four minutes later, the old coot is still cussing up a storm and threatening to kick Tom's ass. Another highlight has Tom lighting his shoes on fire and then running down the street, just to look like a dumbass.

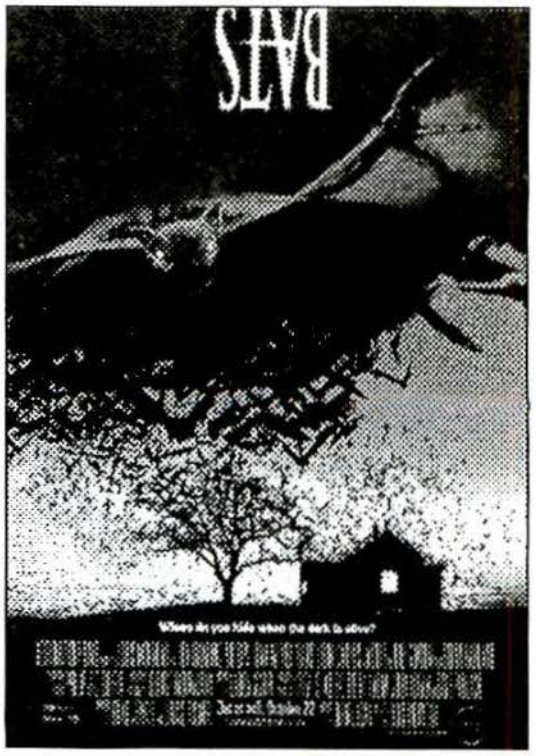
But you also get Tom having a lesbian sex scene airbrushed onto the hood of his father's car, which is just cruel, and Tom fishing his own feces out of the toilet and then placing it in a doll's bed, which is just desperate and unimaginative (not to mention unsanitary). I wouldn't even mention Tom digging brains out of disembodied cow's heads, except that I just did.

The bad outweighs the good on this compilation, but the good is good enough to merit a cursory look.

Bats
(1999)
Columbia/Tristar Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Bats is like every other animal-attack flick you've seen, except that this one somehow hit theaters first. It's bad. How bad? Lou Diamond Phillips bad.

Because of a "secret government project" – a device all screenwriters use when they want to weasel their way out of credible explanations – a Texas desert town is overrun with thousands of lethal, hideously deformed



bats. They don't look so much like bats as they do *Ghoulies* with wings. Not that you really get to see them all that well, as during scenes of supposed action, the director shakes the camera like British nannies do babies.

Cleavage-baring *Starship Trooper* Dina Meyer is the resident bat expert, and Leon – just Leon – is her black sidekick who says lots of things that you're supposed to laugh at, like, "I've been doin' some thinkin' ... *and this shit is fucked-up!"* Leon, change your name to Stepin Fetchit. (And please, God, no more movies where a character says, "Houston, we have a problem," as Leon does here.)

Together with big-belt-buckled sheriff Lou Diamond Phillips, they get into predictable, laughable, CGI bat-attacks and gamely utter all the lines you'd expect in a movie like this, including:

• "Wait a minute! You're telling me *a bat* did this?"

• "But bats don't kill people. This can't be."

• "We've gotta evacuate this entire town."

Early in the film, there's a brief cutaway shot of Phillips grimacing that seems out of place. It looks as though the camera caught him dumping a loaf in his britches, and decided to keep it in. Well, I'm glad they did, because it's a moment most priceless.

It's a shame *Mystery Science Theater 3000* went off the air, because every minute of *Bats* amounts to what could have been a dozen killer quips.

Journey to the Center of Time
(1967)
Madacy Entertainment
★★★☆☆

A team of scientists – led by a dead ringer for Henry Kissinger – experiments with time travel in a project that, naturally, goes terribly wrong, hurling our heroes not to the center of time as the title suggests, but rather all up and down the "space-time continuum."

First, they go 5,000 years into the future and meet a bald-headed femalien with hefty bosoms (played by an actress whose first name is Poupee). Then they pass through the past – with stock footage to illustrate times of pirates, army men and cowboys and Indians – all the way to 1 million years B.C., where they are threatened by that exact same lizard that kept showing up in movies like this around this time.

Funny thing is, for the most part, the gang – which seems to have taken acting tips from Adam West – doesn't venture from their lab. Most of the future and past is seen only via clips projected onto their window, so at its most basic, this is strictly a two-set movie, and one with a special-effects budget limited to sparklers.

The filmmakers make up for any and all lapses in the plot's logic by totally ignoring them. So if anyone can explain fully just what the hell actually happened in this ill-fated *Journey*, you win a prize.

RoboCop 2
(1990)
Orion Home Video
★★★★☆

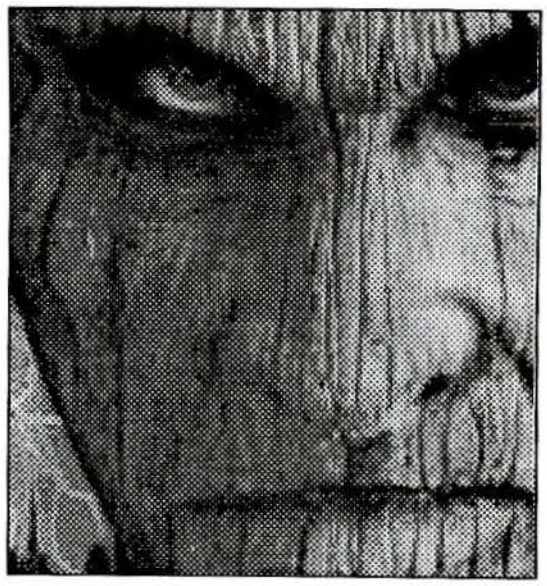
I hated this when it was first released, but watching for a second time nearly a decade later, I enjoyed the hell out of it. As long as you don't directly compare it to Paul Verhoeven's superb original, you'll get a kick out of it, too. Sure, it's missing most of the clever humor and biting satire of the first, but it's still a comic-book ride with outstanding special effects.

In *RoboCop 2*, the Detroit of the not-so-distant future is overrun with crime because everyone wants money to get their hands on the designer drug known as "Nuke." RoboCop does his best to clean up the streets, but the corporation that created him is having a bad PR day, so they reprogram Robo to be nicer and more of a role model to the kids. This doesn't last, of course, and RoboCop once again saves the day as he takes down another killer robot in the same vein as ED-209, his previous opponent.

Peter Weller and Nancy Allen return as RoboCop and his partner, respectively, and do fine jobs, even if it may seem they don't get as much screen time as the bad guys. Comic scribe Frank Miller wrote the script, which could use a bit more levity, while *Empire Strikes Back* director Irvin Kershner took over for Verhoeven. While it seems like a better film today, had *RoboCop 2* retained more of the original's spirit, the franchise likely would still be healthy.

The Fear
(1995)
A-Pix Home Video
★★★☆☆

A college student recruits his girlfriend and a bunch of other people to go spend a



The Fear: Meet Morty.

week in the woods confronting their fears for his thesis. They all sit around and talk about what scares them, while a man made of wood sits in the room, too. Why? Dunno – I had to go pee. There's also an old man there dressed as Santa. Why? Same pee.

The wooden man – named Morty – starts to show up to give them good scares. Like, for instance, when the bimbo who's afraid of water takes a cathartic dip in the hot tub, who should emerge from the bottom but Morty! Oh, it's great fun, especially when this black girl gets possessed by Morty and she starts playing with magnetic letters while Morty does some robot breakdance in the other room. There's also a woman who looks like a man and this dreadlocked white boy character who talks like a gangsta, and you will just want to punch him. Somehow, there's even a subplot about a campus rapist.

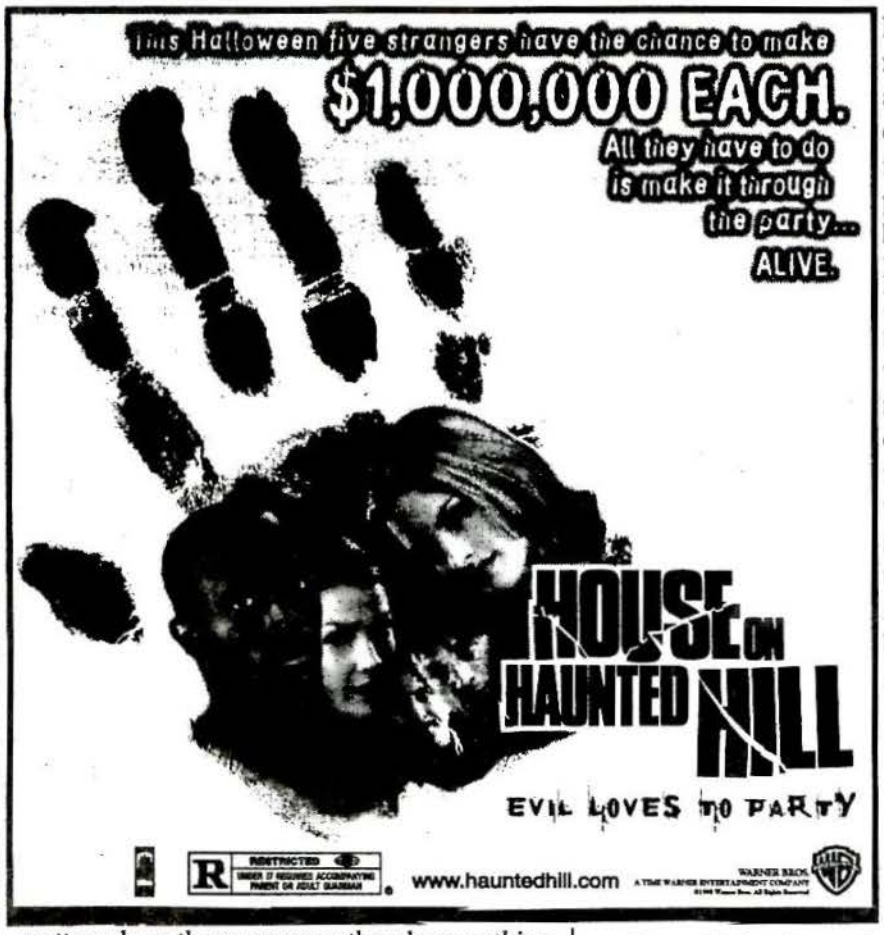
Wes Craven shows up in the beginning and end as the hero's psych professor, yet his talent does not rub off on the rest of the film. Morty returns in the recent *The Fear 2: Halloween Night*.

Phantasm IV: Oblivion
(1998)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★☆☆☆

With *Phantasm IV*, Don Coscarelli hasn't made a proper sequel so much as a loose string of weird, dream-like imagery and anything-but-lucid narrative. This thing makes so little sense that you'll pray for one of those flying metal balls to slam into *your* skull.

Our heroes Mike and Reggie (or the goofy guy and the ice cream man with the ponytail) are still running all over the country being pursued by The Tall Man (Angus Scrimm). You'd think after three times, the fourth story would either end the series or take it in a new direction, but *Phantasm IV* does neither.

And I understand that the *Phantasm* world has no real rules, but this is ridiculous. No



matter where these guys go, there's *something* evil there waiting for them. And pressure like that would just drive people to suicide, so that's too easy. Thus, Coscarelli has used his imagination in the most unimaginative way possible.

House on Haunted Hill
(1999)
Warner Home Video
★★★★☆

Well, it's no *The Haunting* ... and thank God for that!

A remake of the classic William Castle film starring Vincent Price, this *House on Haunted Hill* might as well have been titled *Tales from the Crypt Presents House on Haunted Hill*, because coming from producers Joel Silver and Robert Zemeckis, that's exactly what it feels like. It's a fun movie with both humor and horror, played well and with excellent production values. All that's missing is the Cryptkeeper, though Chris Kattan looks close enough.

Geoffrey Rush stars as Steven Price (and sporting a Vincent Price mustache, no less), an amusement-park tycoon whose witchy wife (Famke Janssen) wants to hold her birthday party in a long-abandoned mental hospital thought to be haunted. An expert prankster, Price offers their five guests $1 million each if they can survive the night. He's simply trying to give them a scare, but the house itself is playing for keeps.

The hip cast is what keeps this machine rolling, especially with the added bonus of a couple of hotties (Ali Larter and Bridgette Wilson). Peter Gallagher, Taye Diggs and Max Perlich help round out the cast, and Jeffrey Combs of *Re-Animator* fame is perfect and perfectly creepy in his villainous role. Director William Malone earns points for filling the frame with nightmarish images one doesn't expect to see. Were it not for its preposterous, hideously stupid final 10 minutes, *House on Haunted Hill* would be a great ride from start to finish.

Dracula
(1979)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

Bram Stoker's creation is brought to the screen once again in what amounts to one of the best adaptations since Universal's original. More Hammer than Hollywood, this *Dracula* is a lavish period piece with a tinge of romance and a fair share of gore, handled with flair with the usually direct-by-numbers John Badham (*Stakeout*).

Years before he turned gray, Frank Langella dons the cape as the Count, and the object of his anti-social desire is Kate Nelligan, daughter of the doting Donald Pleasance, who seems to be playing his Dr. Loomis character with a British accent. The actor's actor Laurence Olivier shows up to help outwit the Count once bone-dry bodies start surfacing.

Badham achieves the right amount of Gothic creepiness without harming the pace. Pleasantly, this *Dracula* moves along at a pretty quick pace, unlike Francis Ford Coppola's bloated and pretentious 1992 update. However, any time Langella was onscreen, I couldn't help but think, "This guy puts his penis in Whoopi Goldberg."

Another 9 1/2 Weeks
(1997)
Trimark Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

More than a decade after Mickey Rourke and Kim Basinger bumped tummies in the kitchen and everywhere else, Rourke is back for some strange sexual situations. Basinger is nowhere to be found, obviously, but what's most surprising is that even after all the reports of Rourke's unwillingness to bathe, they still found a sexy woman who would agree to co-star.

And that would be former model Angie Everhart. When the dreary, oh-so-arty flick begins, Rourke has a straight razor on the breasts of some blindfolded woman. He doesn't cut her up, but she leaves and he goes and buys art. Soon he meets Everhart, and they just seem to click because ... well, because they both like it rough.

The prospect of seeing Everhart unclothed is at an all-time high, but for the most part, she barely shows any skin. In fact, remember Basinger's big musical number in the first *9 1/2 Weeks*, as she took clothes off? Well, Everhart has one while she puts clothes *on*. And while Mick's sleeping, no less! Kids, she was sexier eating hearts in *Bordello of Blood*.

The Apartment Complex
(1999)
N/A
★☆☆☆☆

Psych major Chad Lowe takes a job as a manager of an L.A. apartment complex filled with crazy tenants, including R. Lee Ermey and Amanda Plummer. His first day on the job, he fishes a bloated dead body out of the pool, and finds himself the police's No. 1 suspect. To make matters worse, there's a rather large snake running loose on the grounds.

Far too quirky for comfort, this comedy-suspense piece marks a major departure in subject matter for director Tobe Hooper, he of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Poltergeist* and (more recently and embarrassingly) *The Mangler*. But that doesn't make it very good. Unless you count Plummer's nude scene – and I sure do – it's horror-free.

Shark Attack
(1999)
Trimark Home Video
★★☆☆☆

When his friend is killed by sharks in Africa, Casper Van Dien takes a break from writing his dissertation (yeah, *right*) and high-tails it over there to investigate. Unfortunately, he does so with a hairdo that covers one eye, making him look like a senior in high school.

Upon arrival, he meets Ernie Hudson, virtually reprising his role from *Congo*; Bentley Mitchum, who has none of his father Robert's talent, charisma or looks; and Jennifer McShane, hands down the ugliest female lead of the year. (Casper must have it in his contract that no one prettier than he shall be cast.)

As it turns out, there are sharks, or so it would seem, as humans and sharks appear together in a frame only a few times. Yep, this flick is stock footage galore, but for one entitled *Shark Attack*, it sure could stand a few more shark attacks, although one bikinied

boater does get her leg chomped on. This is also one of those films where boats explode the second they touch rock.

Blood Beach
(1980)
Media Home Entertainment

★★★☆☆

This was the stuff of schoolyard legend when I was a kid, for the scene in which the monster lurking underneath the sand of a California beach chomps off a guy's dick. Of course, the actual scene is much less gory than the kids made it out to be, but it's there, and that's what counts.

Several people are sucked into the sand, and the cops – including John Saxon and that irascible rascal Burt Young – are puzzled. A dog even loses its head, while a geek with a metal detector and long navy socks is swallowed whole. When you finally get to see the creature, you'll be underwhelmed; it looks like a big, green flower. Young blows it up with TNT, but the cool ending montage shows sinister forces once again at work on the crowded beach.

The World Is Not Enough
(1999)
MGM/UA Home Video

★★☆☆☆

How does one follow the most successful James Bond adventure ever? If you don't have an answer, don't fret – the producers of *The World Is Not Enough* haven't a clue, either, unless their response is "miserably." With the runaway success of 1997's *Tomorrow Never Dies*, you'd think the 007 franchise was well-poised for the next few adventures. Sadly, they've taken a mighty step back.

On paper, it reads well enough: Following the death of her father, heiress Electra King (Sophie Marceau) finds her life under constant threat, prompting Her Majesty's Secret Service to assign James Bond (Pierce Brosnan, filling the suit for a third go-round) to protect her. Behind the danger is Renaud (Robert Carlyle), a shaven-head madman who has a bullet lodged in his brain, which has made him impervious to pain. His plot to rule the world is furthered by a plutonium heist, which gives Bond a new ally in the comely nuclear physicist Dr. Christmas Jones, played by *Wild Things* sexpot Denise Richards.

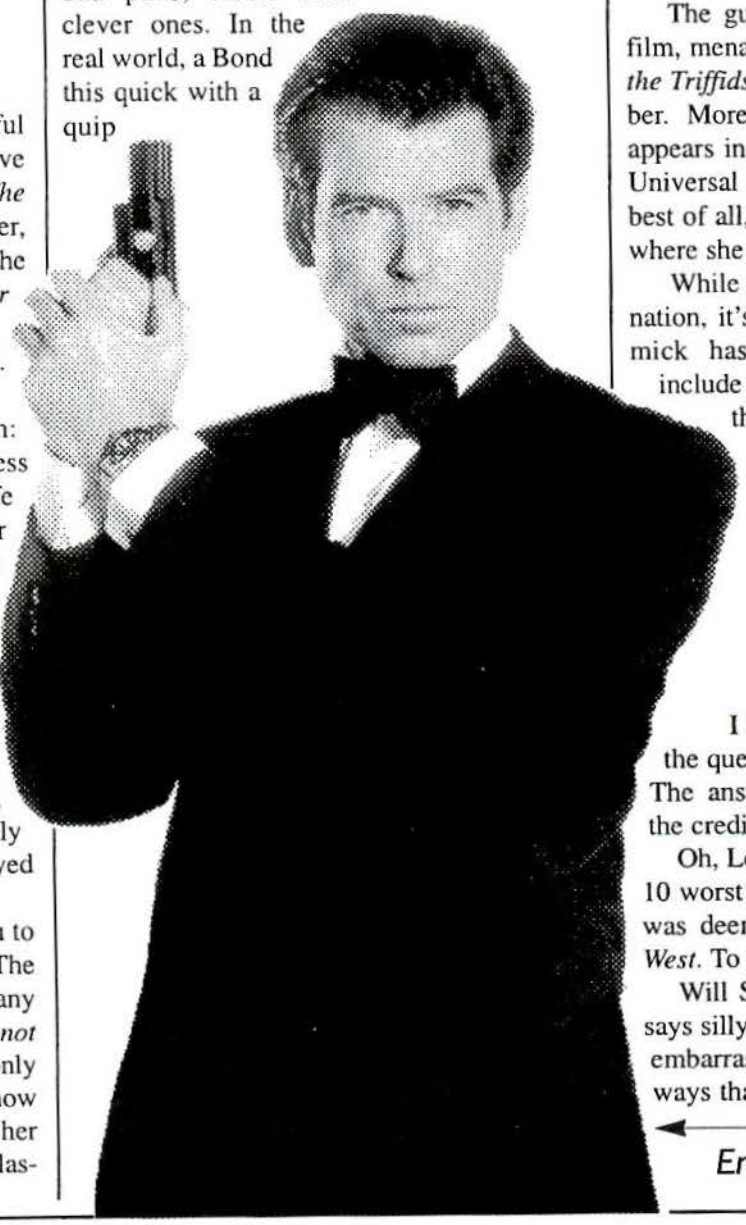
If that last bit of story detail caused you to laugh and/or choke, you're not alone. The casting of Richards is so wrong on so many levels that it cripples any hopes of *World not* becoming one big joke. I know she's only here because she's more than willing to show off her sculpted pair of Thunderballs, but her acting is more wooden than her body is plastic.

"I've got to stop it," she says at one point, referring to a potential nuclear meltdown, yet does so with the urgency one might muster up when faced with a leaky kitchen faucet.

Carlyle is as threatening as a villain as Dr. Evil, whom he clearly resembles. The pasty-faced Marceau is saddled with poor dialogue, and Brosnan – though he's the best Bond since Sean Connery – merely looks tired. I can see why; the action scenes fail to pack much action.

Traditionally, the opening pre-credit sequence is a stunner that gets you juiced for the next two hours. Here, it's overlong and not all that exciting. What follows are scenes that you can't help but feel like you've seen 'em all before. A ski chase? Seen it. Twice, in fact, in *For Your Eyes Only* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. A finale involving a submarine at a secret hideout? We just saw that yesterday in *Tomorrow*, not to mention *The Spy Who Loved Me*. A henchman with a dental problem? Pick any of the flicks co-starring Richard Kiel.

Even the obligatory utterings of "Bond ... James Bond" and "Shaken, not stirred" have become groan-inducing. The one-liners are more juvenile than ever, with a reliance on bad puns, rather than clever ones. In the real world, a Bond this quick with a quip would be sleeping alone.



If the producers want to hit another home run, may I suggest bringing back *Tomorrow* sidekick Michelle Yeoh? At the very least, hiring a real director – rather than a workman-like Michael Apted – would give the next installment some much-needed fireworks.

Because this *World* clearly *isn't* enough. And, for once, a Bond title makes perfect sense.

Roger Corman's The Phantom Eye
(1999)
N/A

★★★☆☆

Produced for the AMC cable channel for its annual Halloween "Monsterfest," this slim feature casts B-movie king Roger Corman as a diabolical programmer at AMC who sends two fresh interns deep into the horror vaults to retrieve a title called *The Phantom Eye*.

The eager-to-please youths – one a cute blonde, the other a stereotypical Jewish kid – separate and find themselves stuck in a series of old horror films, and must use their film knowledge to escape with their lives. This self-referential gimmick works pretty well, especially since the segments are filmed in stock appropriate to that film.

The guy ends up in a Hammer vampire film, menaced by a plant vaguely like *Day of the Triffids* and in a '50s beach monster number. More interestingly, our sassy heroine appears in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a Universal mummy movie, a silent film and, best of all, a Mexican entry with an evil doll, where she finds her voice dubbed.

While *The Phantom Eye* is long on imagination, it's short on knowing when the gimmick has worn thin. Corman's co-stars include Frank Gorshin, Jonathan Haze and the midget from *Twin Peaks*. Despite what the title has you believe, Corman did not direct. Too bad.

Wild Wild West
(1999)
Warner Home Video

★☆☆☆☆

I had to watch this if only to answer the question, "Could it really be *that* bad?" The answer became perfectly clear before the credit sequence began: Yes, it is.

Oh, Lord, does this suck. Easily one of the 10 worst movies of the '90s, *Wild Wild West* was deemed by many critics as *Mild Mild West*. To me, it was *Worst Worst at Best*.

Will Smith stars as a black cowboy who says silly things to the bad guys. Kevin Kline embarrasses himself so badly in so many ways that by the time he was doing a karate

Enough is enough, Pierce.

act, I just wanted to hide. Together, they go search for a group of scientists kidnapped by the legless Dr. Loveless, played by the humorless Kenneth Branaugh. The role of the requisite love interest is filled – and I do mean *filled* – by saucy Salma Hayek, who seems to have maybe five minutes of screen time.

If you've seen the trailer, you've seen the whole movie, albeit in a much less painless way. Kline dresses up like a woman (*Ha-ha!*), Smith cracks wise before *and* after he punches people (*Stop it! You're killin' me!*), and the two of them fight a giant metal tarantula (*No, really, I mean it – quit! I'm about to cry.*) that Branaugh has built.

The only two positive things I can say about it: 1) The opening credits sequence is retro-cool. 2) Salma shows her ass.

Other than that, zip. Barry Sonnenfeld, go to hell.

The Bat
(1959)
Sinister Cinema
★★★★☆

The title refers not to the fanged nocturnal creature (though they can be found here), but rather a mysterious killer loose in a mansion. "The Bat," as he's dubbed, is a dapper criminal, sporting a hat and black pantyhose over his face, with cool claws on his fingertips, which he uses to slice open his victims' throats.

Vincent Price is a doctor who experiments on bats, so you know from frame one that he's the prime suspect. Red herrings are thrown about that you'll spot in a heartbeat, but the movie is creepy enough – albeit in a subtle way – that you'll want to stick around for it all. *Bewitched*'s Agnes Moorehead, however, overacts like mad as the mansion's current occupant.

Primal Force
(1998)
Paramount Home Video
★★★★☆

A movie doesn't have to do much to be entertaining. Just throw in some crazed monkeys and I'm glued. That's what *Primal Force* does. Essentially a *Congo* rip-off about three years too late, it plants a small group of humans on a remote island populated by evolving killer baboons that look a lot like *ALF* with Down's Syndrome.

Leading the pack is Ron Perlman, an actor who looks not unlike a monkey himself. The baboons kill just about everybody, and before they attack, the screen flashes white, so there's no suspense here. Not that I expected any. Nor needed any, what with the fair amount of monkey carnage that goes on here. And what's the only thing more entertaining than crazed monkeys? Burnt crazed monkeys. And this one's got that, too.

It's directed in a hyper-styled manner, suggesting what it might look like if Luc Besson were reduced to cranking out made-for-TV movies. Hey, it's only a matter of time.

Free Enterprise
(1998)
Pioneer Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

In modern-day L.A., two film and comic-book geeks worship *Star Trek* and William Shatner, and one day they meet him reading porn in a bookstore, and he doesn't turn out to be all that they expected. But that's really just a small part of the movie. The rest of the time, the two guys just run around town demonstrated what big geeks they really are.

Shatner wants their help in producing a musical version of *Julius Caesar*, with all the parts to be played by him. This might have made a good movie, but the filmmakers (who named the two leads after themselves) choose to focus instead on their geek obsessions, avoiding the *Caesar* angle entirely, until the very welcome end, when Shatner and a rap outfit perform an atrocious, impromptu ditty at a party.

For the record, I laughed once. For a comedy, a count like that is the kiss of death.

The Omega Code
(1999)
TBN Entertainment
★★★☆☆

Self-described as "The #1 Christian Movie in America!," *The Omega Code* is a fictional account of a power struggle over the supposed code embedded in the Bible that tells the future. You'll realize right off the bat just *how* fictional, when *Starship Trooper* Casper Van Dien is introduced as a double doctorate, best-selling author and globe-trotting adviser on issues that affect the world.

Michael York is the international mogul who on the surface looks to unite the world, but really wants to be worshipped by all. And with the Bible code in hand, he can achieve it. (He's the devil, you know.) Catherine Oxenberg is a TV reporter who aids Van Dien in the mission to expose York for the satanic slime he is. Why Van Dien ever gets involved still remains a mystery to me, as does his character trait of being unable to walk *around* a couch rather than *over* it.

The most interesting facet of the story – the code itself – is thrown by the wayside to make room for what passes for action here: a car chase, Van Dien being chased by a semi, a horse inexplicably baring demon eyes for a split second.

This is bad material, both on paper and in execution, providing more laughs than any of the three comedies I saw the same week. Van Dien is most to blame, with his high-school-drama-class-style of acting. At one point, he even "raises the roof," a move later demonstrated by York as well.

Omega's low budget (funded by Christian cable network TBN, where this should have premiered) doesn't allow for us to see the end-of-the-world catastrophes the script mentions, and what few special effects there are fall somewhere between *Puppet Master 4* and *Puppet Master 5*. If you can for certain tell what happens at the end, you win a prize.

Don't get me wrong, though: I had one hell of a time. But somehow, I think TBN had a different agenda. *The Omega Code* is like going to church and the preacher says some really funny things, but doesn't know it.

The Haunted Sea
(1987)
New Horizons Home Video
★★★☆☆

A film that reminded me a lot of *Virus* except that I could sit through this one, *The Haunted Sea* is about a ship full of people that encounters a ship with no people. In fact, all it has is some Aztec artifact that turns whoever touch it into a guy in a really bad walking-snake costume.

As the ship's captain, James Brolin stays put while the others investigate, and looks just like Capt. Nemo. Looking rather harsh, Joanna Pacula is the first mate, while the lovely *Emmanuelle in Space* star Krista Allen is the second mate, and she gets naked a total of four times (thank *you*, Mr. Corman) over the film's mercifully brief 1:14 running time.

Pacula and Allen – who sports some of the finest breasts in the biz – search through the ship's cavernous halls, much like anyone in an *Alien*-type movie would be apt to do. They find the snake man, run from the snake man, try to kill the snake man and Allen has some bizarre flashbacks to a previous life where she worshipped the snake man ... so much that she'd yank down her top for him.

Because this is a Roger Corman production, this *Carnosaur*-on-a-ship production is comprised of nearly 20 percent stock footage.

For no discernible reason, it took three people to write the music score.

From Dusk Till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter
(2000)
Dimension Home Video
★★★★☆

Miles above *FDTD2*, *The Hangman's Daughter* is closer in spirit to the original, with sensibilities leaning more toward Robert Rodriguez than Quentin Tarantino. Unlike its immediate predecessor, this is no sequel, but rather a prequel, detailing how a young Latina hottie became Satanico Pandemonium, the seductive vampire (played by Salma Hayek in the original).

The budget on this one looks to be at least double as the last one, and it helps. The cast is an improvement, too, with Rebecca Gayheart essaying a role as a Bible thumper-turned-vampire and *Mad TV*'s Orlando Jones in a funny supporting bit as a traveling brush salesman.

Though it takes a while to get moving, once our anti-heroes (including Michael Parks as writer Ambrose Bierce) arrive at the Titty Twister bar, the flick catches fire. Of course, it's basically a rehash of the first *FDTD*'s second half, but one can never see enough impalings, beheadings and otherwise gory vampire killings.

Millennium Man
(1999)
Paramount Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Glen A. Larson – noted purveyor of '70s TV-cheese like *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* – is back with a quasi-superhero flick containing about sixty cents' worth of fresh ideas.

In Rome, while trying to free his ex-girlfriend and her son from the clutches of her evil husband (we know he's evil because of his thick Italian accent), some chisel-faced do-gooder has the unfortunate pleasure of meeting a corporate-sponsored cyborg with glowing red eyes, lasers shooting out of his hands and a thirst for murder. The android – "Adaman" – kills our hero, until the suspect organization behind all this gives him the same computer technology as his enemy. Thus, there's a good Millennium Man and a bad Millennium Man running around, eyes glowing and lasers shooting. Or something like that. I found it all very confusing and short on Millennium Man action.

Director Bradford May – who did far better work on the *Darkman* sequels – makes the mistake of shooting every fifth shot or so in black-and-white. It stars no one you've ever seen before and a lot of stock footage you have.

Timebomb
(1991)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★★★☆

A surprisingly good and effective B-thriller, *Timebomb* is like a *Manchurian Candidate* update for the '90s. Michael Biehn (of several James Cameron films) stars as Eddie, an unassuming watchmaker who starts having violent, pornographic dreams that suggest he may have been a government assassin. When a gang of cronies starts trying to kill him for no reason, his suspicions are confirmed.

Patsy Kensit costars as a shrink who aids in his escape and ends up falling for him, naturally. The ending is rather rote, but *Timebomb* is much better than it ever had a right to be.

The Many Faces of Zorro
(1998)
Passport Video
★★☆☆☆

Godzilla and Other Movie Monsters
(1999)
Passport Video
★★★★☆

The Mummy
(1999)
Passport Video
★★★★★

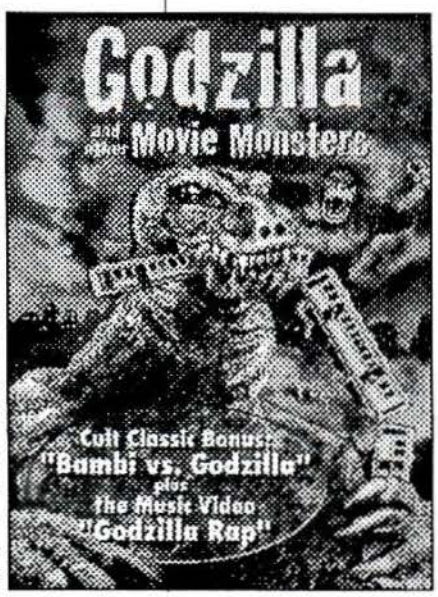
What excites me most about DVD is the format's allowance for *programming* a disc and packing it with extras, rather than simply slapping on a feature and including nothing else (the video equivalent to a cheese pizza).

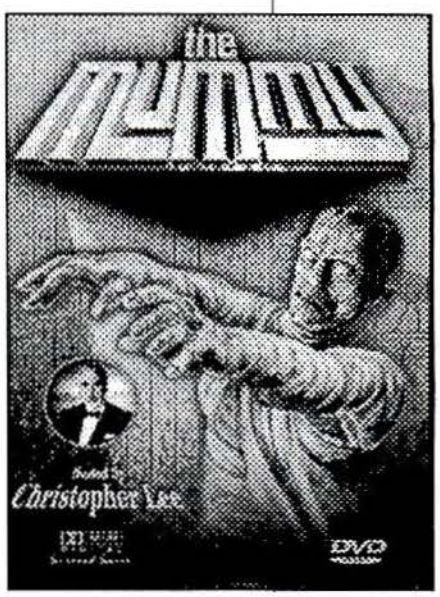
While the folks at Passport Video may not have access to the highest quality transfers, they've at least got the DVD concept down pat, as is apparent with a trio of recent movie documentaries.

You'd have to be a hardcore Zorro fan to get a kick out of *The Many Faces of Zorro*, but I am not of that school. The program is a retrospective of the numerous Zorro films, serials and TV shows, and features extra interviews with the three stars of the big-budget *The Mask of Zorro* from two summers back. For the record, those stars are Catherine Zeta-Jones and, uh ... where was I? Lessons on using a whip and swordfighting round out the extras. If this disc had combined Zeta-Jones with the whip lessons, I'd have given it five stars.

Much more enjoyable is *Godzilla and Other Movie Monsters*, a long – and perhaps overlong – look at not only Godzilla movies, but basically *any* movie with a monster of any kind, prehistoric or otherwise. Is it a stretch to include *The Flintstones*? Probably so, and the loss of focus makes its flaws apparent. But the extras are pretty good. Save for a stupid Godzilla rap music video, the Willis O'Brien dino-classic *The Lost World* has been whittled down to a 10-minute, nothing-but-the-best featurette, and Marv Newland's immortal *Bambi vs. Godzilla* cartoon short is here, too. And if that bit of animation can make it to DVD, I have high hopes for the format.

Getting it most of all is *The Mummy*, hosted by Christopher Lee. It's actually a portion of a *100 Years of Horror* special from a few years ago, dealing with movie mummies from Universal to Hammer, and segments on cinema's living dead. It moves along at a nice pace, shows some great clips and boasts some fine-looking menus. But it's the variety of extras that makes this so much fun. Aside from newsreel footage from the '30s of the opening of King Tut's tomb, you get the Superman cartoon "The Mummy Strikes" and a making-of featurette on Charlton Heston's *The Omega Man*.





The Alien Legacy
(1999)
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
★★★★☆

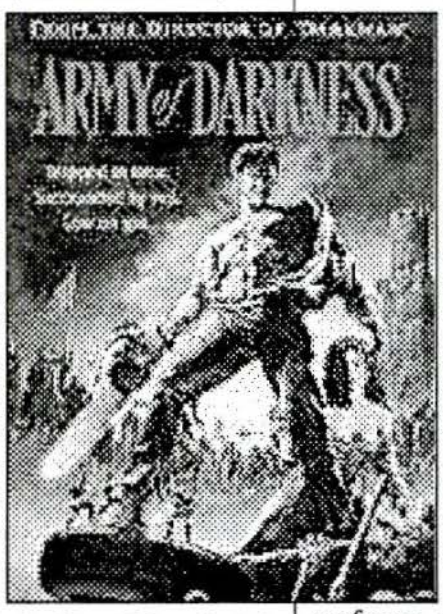
A supplement to the newly released *Alien* 20th anniversary box set, *The Alien Legacy* is an hour-long documentary about the making of this sci-fi classic. Interviews abound with director Ridley Scott, artist H.R. Giger and various crew members and special-effects experts. Their stories of the production are largely interesting, illustrated with wonderful pre-pro sketches and designs.

Cut footage also is a big draw, including the much-discussed "cocoon" sequence. Strangely, none of *Alien*'s actors are interviewed. Not mentioned are any of the series' other three films.

Army of Darkness
(1993)
Anchor Bay Entertainment
★★★★☆

Sam Raimi's third entry in his *Evil Dead* trilogy doesn't come near to matching the brilliance of *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn*, but it's a worthy follow-up, and far more entertaining than the original.

As *Army of Darkness* opens, Ash (played to the hilt by should-be-a-big-star Bruce Campbell) has left the 20th century and warps into medieval times, where, after surviving an initial encounter with "the pit bitch," he is hailed a hero. The knights ask him to retrieve the Book of the Dead, which he does, but screws up in his own inimitable way, thus unleashing armies of sword-slinging skeletons.



AOD is virtually plotless, and the entire second half is an extended battle scene/homage to *Jason and the Argonauts*. Campbell rattles off his he-man one-liners with deadpan glee. The DVD contains both the theatrical ending – which I love, primarily for blessing us with the line, "Name's Ash ... housewares" – and the original ending, which would be more inventive if it weren't so *Planet of the Apes*ish.

The disc also contains a half-hour special-effects documentary entitled *The Men Behind the Army*, and the theatrical trailer, which proves Universal didn't have a clue how to sell this thing, dooming it from the start.

Teaching Mrs. Tingle
(1999)
Dimension Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Either *Scream* was a total fluke or we should just never allow Kevin Williamson behind the camera again, because his directorial debut is as limp as any.

Katie Holmes is an A+ high school student headed toward valedictorian status when her bitch history teacher (Helen Mirren) threatens to expel her for cheating, even though she hasn't. To prevent this academic nightmare, Holmes and two classmates visit Mrs. Tingle at her home to talk things out, but end up holding her hostage for days, hoping she'll come to her senses.

I kept hoping Williamson would do, and decide whether he wanted this lame flick to be scary or funny, because it can't be both and ends up being neither. The dialogue is terrible, with teens talking in ways that teens simply don't talk, except on *Dawson Reeks*. The one saving grace is Marisa Coughlan, a redheaded cutie who makes Holmes look like dog food. She does a good *Exorcist* impression that is the highlight of the whole thing, but wholly out of place.

The Haunting of Hell House
(1998)
New Horizons Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Leave it to Roger Corman to cash in on a hot cinematic trend, this time with the recent rash of haunted house flicks, all with similar titles. This one's no exception, and unfortunately, ends up being nearly as unwatchable as *The Haunting*.

This being an adaptation of a Henry James novel, *Hell House* takes place long ago, when people, like, rode horses and stuff. A young couple goes to an abandoned house and make love on the stairs (the similarities to *Risky Business* end there). She ends up pregnant and has a back-alley abortion that kills her. The young man is haunted by her ghost, not to mention visions of bleeding hallways and such.

Good thing he bonds with his professor, played by Michael York. As the owner of the house in which the two lovebirds humped on the stairs, he too is plagued by unwelcome visits of spirits, namely his deceased daughter.

What happens next is not much of anything, which is to say it's entirely boring. It's as if Corman was trying to revisit the glory days of his Poe pictures, yet without the color or the fun. Aside from a few good nightmarish images, *Hell House* offers nothing extraordinary.

Though I hardly ever do this, I must remark on a preview that can be found before the film, for some piece of crap named *Cybercity*. Washed-up C. Thomas Howell portrays some gruff, renegade fellow in the apocalyptic future. The narrator remarks about on whose side Howell may lie, to which a straight-faced C. remarks, "How 'bout the side that's gonna kick your fuckin' ass?" Oh, Lordy, it's a beautiful moment.

The Shining
(1980)
Warner Home Video
★★★★☆

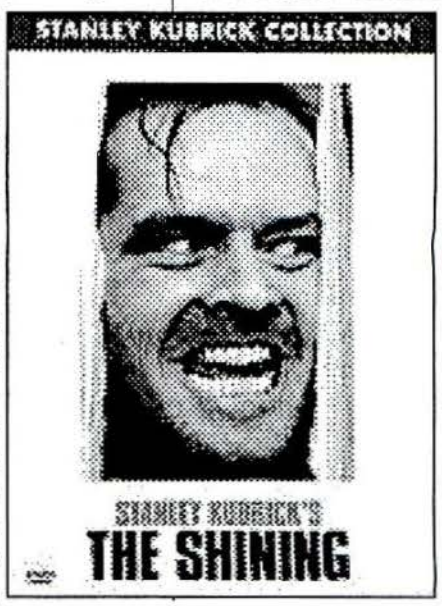
Eyes Wide Shut and *Barry Lyndon* notwithstanding, *The Shining* marks Stanley Kubrick's only foray into the world of horror. And while it's purposely slow, it has several great creep-outs: the old lady in the bathtub, the two girls in the hallway, that Bela Bartok music. Hell, just watching the trailer – in which blood pores out of an elevator – alone was enough to scare me.

Jack Nicholson typecast himself with his role as the caretaker of a massive hotel shut down for the winter. Little by little, the place gets to him, and he goes crazy, to the point of trying to kill his wife and kid. I'm pretty sure it's all an allegory for alcoholism, but it's a masterful film regardless.

Interestingly, the DVD is not in widescreen, supposedly because Kubrick never intended the film to be. Doesn't make a lot of sense to me, but I yield to Kubrick. Included is Vivian Kubrick's half-hour documentary, *The Making of The Shining*, long a bootleg fave. Though Viv doesn't have her pop's talent behind the camera, she does show us Stanley berating Shelly Duvall for missing her cue, which is funny, and Scatman Crothers crying as he talks about how fortunate he is to work with the little boy, which is about the most touching and unselfish thing I've ever seen.

Bikini Island
(1991)
Prism Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

Five generic skanks are selected for a *Swimwear Illustrated* (a real magazine) shoot on a tropical island. Accompanying them are a few generic horny California guys who work for the magazine. Chief among them is Jack (as in Ass), who more than gladly sleeps with the various unattractive models, all of whom are at least smart enough to believe that doing so might get them the cover.



Unfortunately, some of them are murdered by having a toilet plunger stuck over their face. And one of the staffers meets his

demise by being shot with arrows as he drives, so naturally, he goes off a cliff.

There are more '80s-style synth-pop music-video montages in this film than there are interesting moments. There's also a chase scene that goes on for longer than these bitches' combined sexual histories. Believe it or not, this film is actually dedicated to someone's memory – an act akin to poking the eyes of that corpse with a stick.

They Live
(1989)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★☆☆

John Carpenter made lots of slip-ups and downright stinkers during the late-'80s and early-'90s, but *They Live* may be the brightest of a forgettable lot.

Wrestler "Rowdy" Roddy Piper has the Kurt Russell role as a flannel-shirted homeless guy looking for work on the streets of L.A. He stumbles upon an alien conspiracy that suggests all of the earth is under mind control. When he wears these special sunglasses, he sees everything in black-and-white; advertisements become stark, Orwellian phrases such as "OBEY" and "CONSUME;" and supposed humans are revealed to be aliens with metallic, skull-like faces.

Well, Roddy being Roddy, he decides to fight back and kill as many as he can. In one memorable scene, he tells a bankful of aliens, "I've come here to do two things: chew bubble gum and kick ass. And I'm all out of bubble gum."

And kick ass he does. Despite having a mullet, Piper does a fairly credible job, though admittedly, not having many lines to say works in his favor.

The media and political satire is pointed and not lost through all the Carpenter-constructed cheese, though the idea wears out its welcome, as does a fight scene between Piper and Keith David that may be the longest on cinematic record.

This would make a perfect *Twilight Zone* episode, but at 1.5 hours, it's clearly padded. Since it's based upon a short story so short it can hardly be called a story at all, this is no real surprise.

Mystery Men
(1999)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

Kinka Usher's superhero satire unfairly failed in theaters, but I thought it was one of the summer's more enjoyable pieces of eye candy. Ben Stiller, William H. Macy and Hank Azaria are Mr. Furious, The Shoveler and The Blue Raja – three sad-sack average Joes who yearn to be superheroes, and when the city's savior Captain Amazing (a terrific Greg Kinnear) is kidnapped, it seems like they have been given an opportunity. But they have no real powers – Furious gets angry, The Shoveler shovels, Blue Raja throws kitchen utensils.

The three decide they need to recruit more heroes into their fold if they're going to succeed. Enter Janeane Garafalo as The Bowler (she bowls), Paul Reubens as The Spleen (he farts) and Kel Mitchell as Invisible Boy (he's invisible only when no one's looking). Under the tutelage of the semi-wise Sphinx (Wes Studi), they learn how to be a team so that they may defeat über-villain Cassanova Frankenstein (Geoffrey Rush).

The premise of a remedial Justice League is great, but just falls short of its true potential. The problem lies within the script (as Usher's DVD commentary reveals, everything you found funny was improvised). But the cast does its best – and there's no denying it's an incredible cast.

Fear
(1995)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★☆☆

Good girl Reese Witherspoon has taken a liking to local rebel and high-school dropout Mark Wahlberg, and this has been the source of much dismay for Reese's pop William Petersen. And who can blame him? As *Boogie Nights* viewers know, Wahlberg's sporting a dick that could choke a donkey, and it wants to play!

Oh, and it doesn't help that Wahlberg's a total psycho case, cut from the now-stock *Fatal Attraction* mold. So when Dad denies Wahlberg the pleasures of Reese's pieces, he goes bonkers, gathers some equally scuzzy friends and they all terrorize the family and aim to kill.

James Foley does a pretty good job with this, though I don't know why he chose to follow up *Glengarry Glen Ross* with what is essentially a teen thriller. Maybe it was the chance to film the scene in which Wahlberg masturbates Reese on the roller-coaster, with The Sundays singing on the soundtrack? Can't blame him.

Hefner Unauthorized
(1999)
N/A
★★★☆☆

The first true biopic of *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner, the made-for-cable *Hefner Unauthorized* casts the reclusive Hef as incredibly smart, business-savvy, hooked on pills and adept at getting laid. In other words, it offers nothing new.

But it's a fun watch, and Randall Batinkoff – while no actor – at least *looks* enough like Hef to carry it through, though he's helped immeasurably by Natasha Gregson Wagner, who plays his doomed secretary and narrates the film from beyond the grave. She's madly in love with her boss, whose idea for a men's magazine with nekkid girls is an immediate hit. Suddenly, Hef has more women wanting to bed him than he knows what to do with, which proves to be his familial downfall.

Rebecca Romijn-Stamos turns in a mega-brief and sadly clothed cameo as Hef's most recent wife, Kimberly Conrad. Pauly Shore even turns up as comedian Lenny Bruce (of all people), in a role that is small, but still too much to take of Pauly.

The one thing the really stands out as you watch *Hefner* is the absence of nudity. And a Hugh Hefner movie without nudity is like listening to a blank tape.

All videos reviewed in this section were done so by Rod Lott.

Ryun Patterson's
HONG KONG EXPRESS

They aren't hard to find. Bootleg tapes of Hong Kong movies are available on the Internet and in Chinatowns across the U.S., and vendors sell tables upon tables of bootleg videos at comic book and science fiction conventions everywhere.

Until recently, I had shied away from such vendors, instead indulging in my obsession via tape trading or saving up my cash for legitimate versions of the films I desired. My reasoning was the standard company line: The bootleg market makes it harder for legitimate companies to make a profit for bringing these great movies to our shores.

But, dismayed by the high cost of my HK habit, I have given in to my darker urges and bought a trio of tapes from one of the bad guys. The video and sound quality isn't up to par of official releases, but these three definitely qualify as guilty pleasures.

Once Upon a Time in China (1991), directed by HK legend Tsui Hark and starring Jet Li, takes the Saturday morning kung fu film to the next level. The story is fairly standard: Legendary hero Wong Fei Hung battles evil and corruption and preserves Chinese culture and tradition.

But it's not what he does; it's how he does it.

Jet Li and crazy, physics-defying wire work go together like chocolate and peanut butter, as he demonstrates wild mid-air acrobatics and agility that put Peter Parker to shame. As the tempo of the battles increases in both complexity and seriousness, the theme of the movie becomes clear:

Bootlegs make it harder for legit companies to make a profit. But, dismayed by high costs, I have given in.

Despite the antagonist's firearms, a determined man can defeat all odds if his kung fu is strong.

It also doesn't hurt to have a harness on that can pull you 30 feet in the air.

Once Upon a Time in China is one of those flicks that makes you want to stand up, complain to your landlord about your horrible living conditions and register to vote. A high- class effort.

Next in my pile of shame is another gem: Jackie Chan's ***Wheels on Meals*** (1984).

This isn't just a Jackie solo flick; it's really a collaborative effort by Chan, Yuen Biao and CBS' *Martial Law* star Sammo Hung (Arsenio Hall is not in this picture), who also serves as the director.

Shot in Spain, Jackie and Yuen are a pair of happy-go-lucky guys who run a lunch cart. When they both fall for a lying, thieving whore, they – as well as police detective Sammo – are drawn into a web of intrigue that includes a lost princess, a motorcycle gang and lots of tall white guys who may as well have the words "Kick Here" on their foreheads.

The slapstick humor and wild stunts climax in a rough-and-tumble romp through the bad guys' castle that includes a great fencing scene and plenty of wireless acrobatics that amaze the senses.

Chan devotees know what to expect from *Wheels on Meals*, but that doesn't stop the film from surprising.

At the bottom of the list (but No. 1 in my heart) is the treasure of treasures, a film I've been searching for eons, the reason I bought these boots in the first place: ***Mr. Vampire*** (1984).

Goddamn, this movie rocks.

It's hard to say whether I know what exactly is going on all the time, but it doesn't matter.

When vampires start chomping on people in a small Chinese town, a wise master and his naive, bumbling student have to make things right. But complications arise when the No. 1 student falls desperately in love with one of the spirits and seriously messes things up.

Before I go on, a word about Chinese vampires: *Awesome.*

Not your normal, sensitive-side Anne Rice girlie vampires, Chinese vampires are more like traditional American zombies. Plus, they don't walk, but hop. Yes, they hop all over the place. And they are governed by other rules: They can only see people when they breathe, they are immobilized if someone writes a Taoist symbol on their heads and they are repelled with sticky rice. (Please note that sticky rice costs more than regular rice, so watch those shopkeepers who are looking to save a buck!)

But they like blood all the same, and their antics are prone to making them look like *Scooby-Doo* villains. Combine these monsters with the sharp and funny kung fu stylings of the town's Taoist priests, and the results are magical.

So even if the import industry burns to the ground due to my bootleg purchases, it's worth it just for *Mr. Vampire*.

But, fortunately, it looks like my guilt was misplaced. Tai Seng has just announced a slew of brand new DVDs priced around $20! Among them are the awesome *City on Fire*, which Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* ripped off; the great *Peking Opera Blues*; and yes, yes, yes, *Mr. Vampire*.

See you later; I'm moving to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I hear they've got some great bootlegs there. **H**

HARRISON
2-YEAR-OLD MOVIE CRITIC

Scooby-Doo's Greatest Mysteries
(1999)
Warner Home Video
★★★★★

Me watch Scooby-Doo, Daddy. It has ghost in it. Oh, a monster! He no scare me. Scooby-Doo, where are you? Daphne cute. Daphne has shoes. Shaggy funny, Daddy. He likes shakes. Creeper! They dancing! Scooby over, Daddy.

Muppets from Space
(1999)
Columbia/Tristar Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

It's *Sesame Street* movie, Daddy? Oh. Hey, that's not *Sesame Street*. That's frog. Me go home, Daddy.

George of the Jungle
(1997)
Walt Disney Home Video
★★★★☆

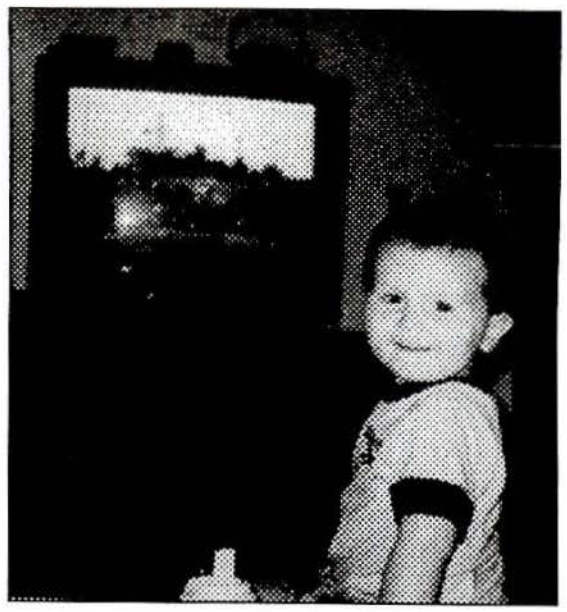
George of Jungle! Watch out tree! Crash! He fall down, Daddy, he fall down! Oh, monkeys! Monkeys, Daddy, monkeys! Monkey talks. He fall down in poo-poo. George fall down! Crash! George over? You wanna watch it again?

Teletubbies:
Dance with the Teletubbies
(1997)
Warner Home Video
★★★★★

Tubbies! I wanna watch Tubbies! Yea, Tubbies! It's Winky! Dipsy! La-La! Po! They dancing, Daddy, they dancing! He jump in water! Splash! He fall down! It's a doggie! Ah – bunny rabbits! Bye-bye, Po!

Winnie the Pooh
(1966)
Walt Disney Home Video
★★★★★

Watch Winnie Pooh? Oh, he has balloon! He go up far! Bees! Oh, no! He fall down! He



stuck! He fly, Daddy! He stuck again. It's over. Watch again, Daddy.

The Jungle Book
(1967)
Walt Disney Home Videof
★★★★★

You like *Jungle Gym Book*? Yeah, it's *Jungle Gym Book*. Ah, monkeys! Oh, elephants! It's elephants, Daddy! Bear. Bear is dancing! It's a snake! It's a girl. It's over. I wanna watch *Jungle Gym Book* again.

H

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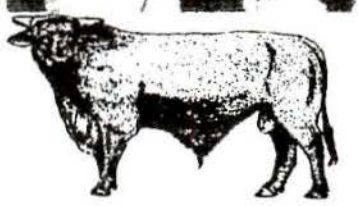
inside message "But mom...Everyone else gets to stay out until midnight!"

inside message Thinking of you



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stray from the herd

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THAT'S GREAT. HEY, HAVE I SHOWN YOU A PICTURE OF MY GIRLFRIEND? SHE'S VIETNAMESE!
VIETNAMESE? HMM... YOU KNOW...
HER PEOPLE HAVE A GOOD WORK ETHIC!
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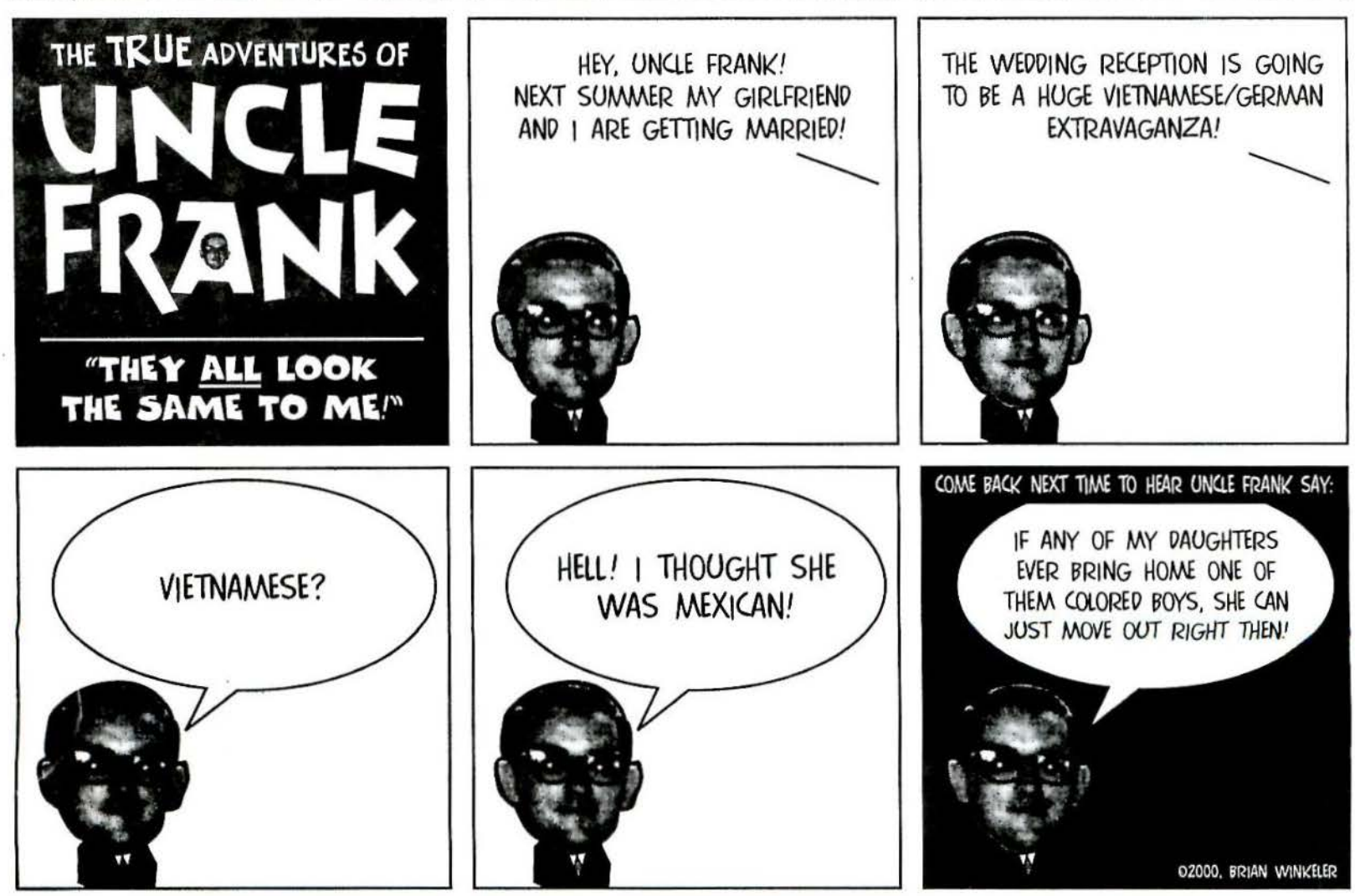
THE TRUE ADVENTURES OF
UNCLE FRANK
"THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME TO ME!"
HEY, UNCLE FRANK! NEXT SUMMER MY GIRLFRIEND AND I ARE GETTING MARRIED!
THE WEDDING RECEPTION IS GOING TO BE A HUGE VIETNAMESE/GERMAN EXTRAVAGANZA!
VIETNAMESE?
HELL! I THOUGHT SHE WAS MEXICAN!
COME BACK NEXT TIME TO HEAR UNCLE FRANK SAY:
IF ANY OF MY DAUGHTERS EVER BRING HOME ONE OF THEM COLORED BOYS, SHE CAN JUST MOVE OUT RIGHT THEN!
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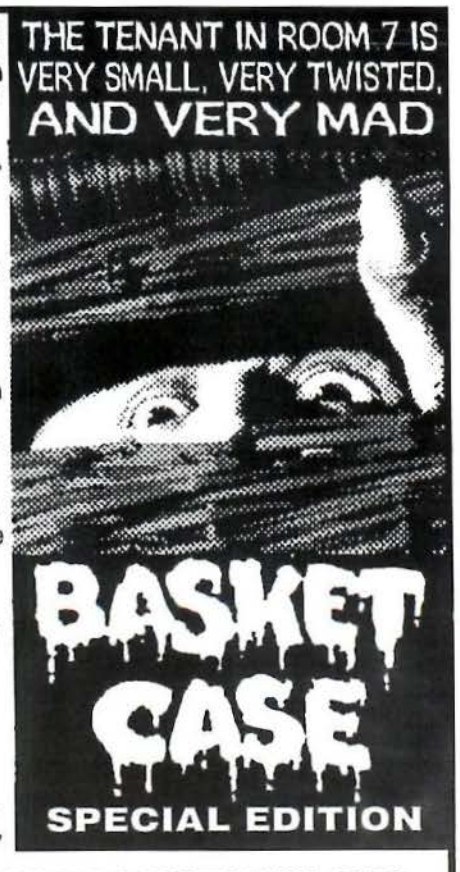
As critic Rex Reed so aptly put it, BASKET CASE is "The Sickest Movie I've Ever Seen!"



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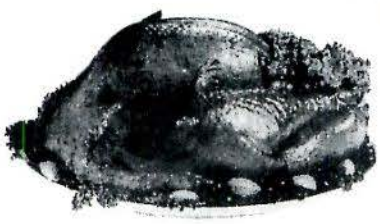

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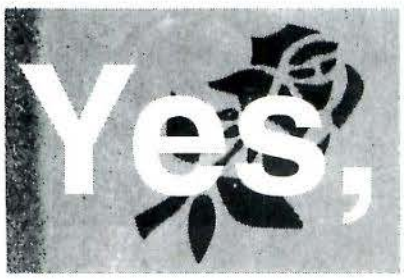

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